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FEBRUARY 2016

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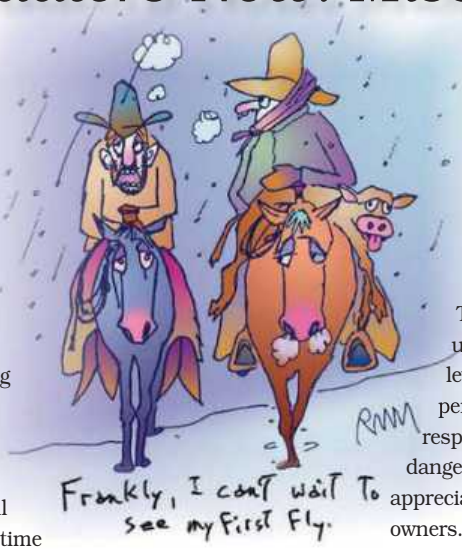


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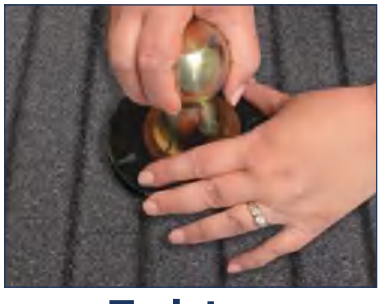
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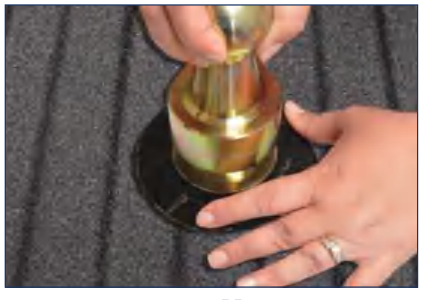


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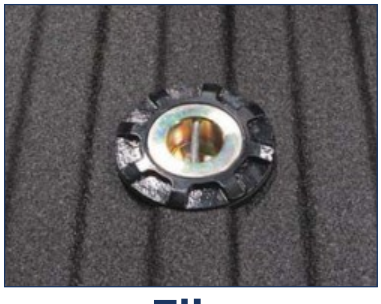
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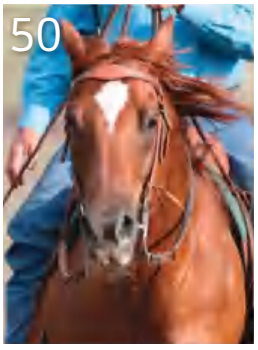
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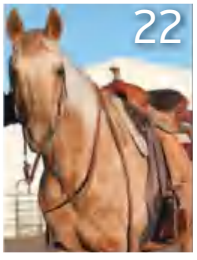
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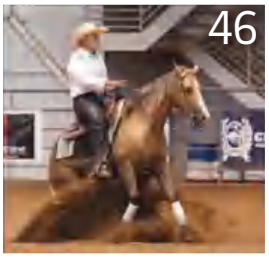




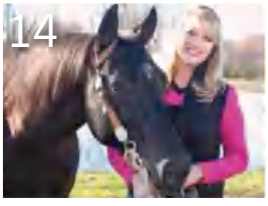






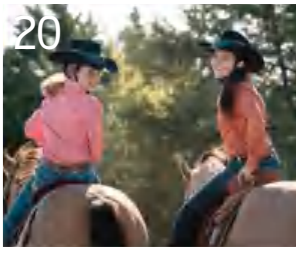












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On the cover: Stylish NXS is a 5-year-old Quarter Horse gelding owned by Tom Kirastoulis of California. Trained and shown by Arizona's Laurel Walker Denton, 'Flash' placed eighth in junior ranch riding at the 2015 AQHA World Show. Photo by Jennifer Paulson

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Awe, Shucks!

Keep your training mistakes to a minimum and avoid Barb Crabbe, DVM's "Top Five Conditioning Flubs," page 50. Go online to discover how to get your horse fit to ride in "Got Fit?"

Ready or Not?

Prepare for your foal's arrival with tips from this issue's *Horsekeeping* department (page 21). Find "Foaling Checklist" at the Website for a handy to-do list.

A Rein's, a Rein's, a Rein

Learn about the direct, indirect, and supporting reins in "The Three Rein Positions" online. Find out which is most effective with a hackamore in *Tack Talk*, page 32.

Old Dog, New Tricks

See "How (and Why) to Find a Trainer" online for help seeking out a professional. Become his star pupil by reviewing "Be Training-Barn Wise" on page 29.

Boarding Done Better

Is your horse content in his current abode? Read this month's *Whole Horse* department (page 12), and then go online to read "Mare Hates New Home."

Join the Herd!

We love hearing from you! Send all high-resolution images for *Conformation Clinic*; *Problem Solvers* questions; and any feedback, ideas, photos, and letters to **HorseandRider@aimmedia.com**. Or mail correspondence to 2520 55th St., #210, Boulder, CO 80301.

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From the Editor

By **Jennifer Paulson**

'Share' With Care



WE IN THE HORSE COMMUNITY LIKE TO SHARE. Break a rein at a horse show? You'll have offers of a lender in no time. Forget your hoof pick on a trail ride? Your friends will have you covered. Need some advice about a training technique? Oh boy, do horse people really (*really*) like to share advice. These "shares" are generally helpful, encouraging acts of kindness—and harmless.

Our sharing tendencies aren't limited to in-person encounters. On social media, we share everything horsey. This is where sharing can wind up being more harmful than helpful, for a variety of reasons.

'Fair Share'

I think most things we pass along on Facebook and other social media fall into the harmless category. Funny memes and videos, heart-warming stories of triumph, photos that inspire—these items enhance and grow camaraderie and build positivity in our community. They can even "lure" newcomers into the fold.

Another positive thing to share: News from trusted sources. Social media is exceptional for sharing health-care concerns, such as disease outbreaks, groundbreaking research, and contamination warnings. I'm sure quite a few horses' lives have been saved thanks to posts with this sort of information.

Not to pat ourselves on the back, but training and horse-care information from magazines like *H&R* always seems to show up on social media just in the nick of time. I can't tell you how often we hear, "I was dealing with this problem, and then your article about it appeared in my newsfeed because a friend shared it right when I needed it most!"

'Share Beware'

The biggest danger I see in social-media posts is rampant lack of context. A photo, screen shot, or short video clip might tell a completely different story from the *truth*. Out-of-context posts that spread like wildfire put horses and riders under unfair (and unrequested) scrutiny. They can ruin reputations in the click of a button. Were you there? Do you know the full story? Is the post from a reliable source? If you answer no, then maybe think twice about clicking the share button and spreading negativity. Or, in some cases, untruthful information.

Keep in mind, too, that sharing negative content makes those potential newcomers we so desperately need think twice about letting their kids ride, starting to ride themselves, or returning to riding after a hiatus.

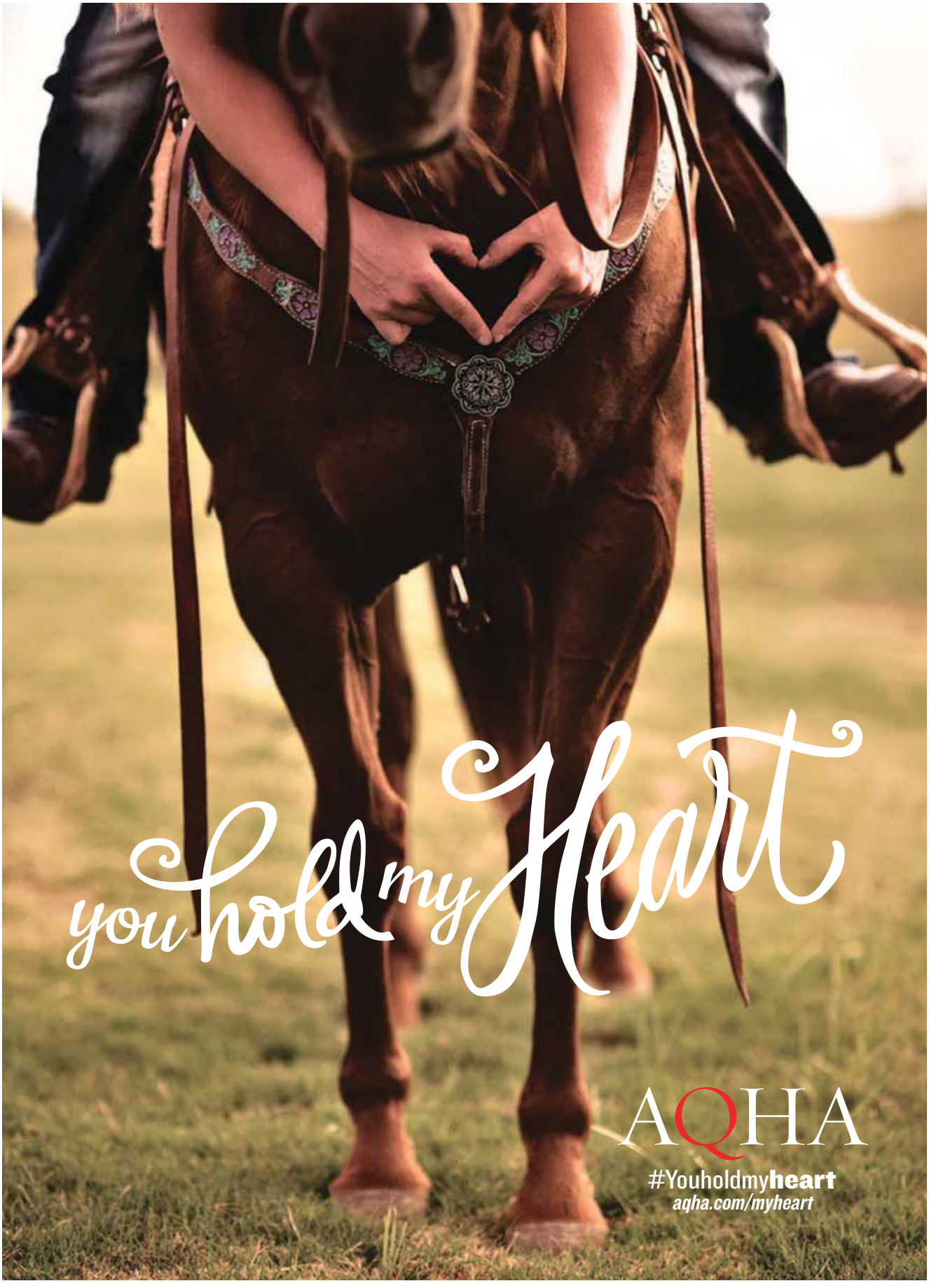
Instead of sharing negative stuff, we should focus on the positive. One way to do that is promoting what we love instead of bashing what we hate. Yup, I read that on Facebook, and I try to adhere to it.

How do you feel about sharing "bad news" about the horse industry? What's your "truth test" before you pass along information? Email me at the address below. □



You can reach Jennifer Paulson at **jpaulson@aimmedia.com**.

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Handling Fear

About 18 months ago I had a bad fall after my horse shied. It resulted in a lengthy recuperation period from a spinal compression fracture. Though I began to ride again 3 months after my accident, I must admit I'm not as fearless as I once was, and have not really enjoyed riding that particular horse because of my fear that he'll suddenly shy and lose me again.

After reading "Get a Handle—Finally—on Your Fear" in the December 2015 issue, I was emboldened to get my horse out of the arena and ride around my whole 10-acre property, front and back, crossing a wooden bridge and small water-filled ditch in the process with no micro-managing and no fear! I'm sure I will have other days when it won't be so easy, but I've taken that step to do something I've been afraid to do, and am now back on my way to enjoying this horse again.

JANE COLN, Mississippi

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Your 'Bests'

In our December 2015 issue, we presented our first "Best Of" feature, highlighting the best things happening in the horse world. We asked readers to send their best moments of last year, and we're happy to share a few of those here.

My best moment of 2015 was when I got my first horse, Blue. I was so proud and so nervous at the same time when I finally got a horse of my own, but now I wouldn't change a thing. I love him!

ASHLYNN ABERNATHY, Alabama

I've had my Paint horse, Bandit, now an 8-year-old gelding, since he was foaled. When he was six months old, he had an eye injury that left him partially blind in his right eye. This never seems to hinder him.

We compete in the Ranch Sorting National Championships. This past April in Loveland, Colorado, I rode in the #11 rookie class at the North Central Regional competition. In this class, a more experienced rider holds the gate and a less experienced rider sorts. Bandit and I are the less experienced team. Out of 160 teams, we placed first. We'd never won that big of a competition before. Not bad for a half-blind horse. I still tear up and smile when I watch the video of our winning run. That was the highlight of my sorting days and something I'll never forget.

CINDY HARDENBURGER, Colorado

Any lesson with my fabulous teacher Sonya Livermore is a "best." But winning lots of ribbons at a Cowboy Dressage competition in Whitesboro, Texas, in October was gratifying. I helped with the office work between rides, which kept my mind occupied and helped me defeat show jitters. I only show a couple of times a year, and it was such a high to see improvement!

LINDA GARRETT, Texas

We trailered our horses to Big South Fork in Northern Tennessee for three days of riding. We rented a cabin with a corral and barn. The highlight of the year was spent together on horseback.

JAY CORNAY, Tennessee

Correction

The December 2015 'Best Of' feature noted that John Lyons competed in 2003's El Camino Del Caballo event. It was his son Josh Lyons who participated.



Best Living Quarters for Boarded Horse?

An owner wonders about the 'next best thing' to a pasture with a loafing shed.

Q I've had trouble locating boarding that offers a field with a run-in shelter. What's the next best living arrangement for my horse?

LYNN INGALLS-BATES
Speedway, Indiana

A Unfortunately, horse owners often have to compromise as facilities and standards vary so much from place to place. Some boarding stables may be better in certain aspects of management than others, so it's best to compare several places, weigh all the relevant options, and see which best meets your particular horse's requirements. Remember, though, that a horse's inborn needs to be physically healthy and mentally happy should have the edge over an owner's desire to keep him as a hothouse flower.

While all horses are individuals, they must have their species-specific needs met. Studies have shown that domestic horses aren't much different from wild or feral horses, mentally or physically. So from the horse's point of view, the ideal boarding facility would have horses living outdoors 24/7 in mixed-sex groups. They'd have plenty of space to move and graze; access to clean, fresh water; and adequate shelter. It sounds relatively simple, yet it can be extremely difficult to find this ideal home for your horse.

More consideration should be given to horses' welfare in the hours when they're not being ridden and trained (see box). Their basic behavioral needs include "the three Fs"—friends, forage, and freedom. If these basics aren't met for your horse, it can affect his health, behavior, and performance.

By nature, horses are social herd animals, so having equine company and the opportunity to socialize with others of their own kind is essential. In nature, they'd typically graze for approximately 18 hours and travel up to 100 miles a day, so access to daily turnout with grazing is vital. If good grazing is scarce where you are, then



‘Those Other 23 Hours’

Jan Ladewig, DMV, PhD of Copenhagen University says the quality of a horse’s day outside his riding routine is of paramount significance. At a recent international equine science conference, he emphasized the importance of considering the other 23 hours of the day that we aren’t riding our horses. He stressed we need to consider how to create group environments where horses can “learn how to socialize and interact with each other peacefully from an early age.” He went on to say it’s vital that horses have “other equine company, dirt to roll in, trees to stand under, bushes to hide behind, and branches to chew on.” He also said owners should routinely provide “a variety of forages to fulfill a horse’s natural needs.”

turnout with free access to grass hay is a good substitute.

Most stables will have variations of these management options—perhaps single-sex herds, individual turnout, or poor grazing. Try to find a place that offers those three Fs at least for a portion of each day. If you can’t find a stable that offers what you’re looking for, consider renting a field and sharing with other like-minded horse owners. You may even find it’s possible to erect the kind of shelter you’d like.

Some countries are now starting to recognize that horses need higher standards of welfare in their daily management to meet their behavioral and physical needs. The Swiss government has recently passed a law stating horses must be kept with other equines and have daily turnout. For the horses’ benefit, I hope this example will be followed elsewhere in the world.

JUSTINE HARRISON, CHBC, IAABC
Certified Horse Behavior Consultant
equinebehaviourist.co.uk

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For tips on getting your horse happily settled in a new environment, see “Mare Hates New Home” at the Web site.

Send horse health and behavior questions to **jfmeyer@aimmedia.com**. Include horse’s age, breed, gender.

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HR 2016-02



Memories Inside the Box

What could be inside this old cardboard carton, she wondered. Then it all came back.

By **Diane Staton**



The author with her reiner, Blackie.

I recently spent two days digging through junk and sweeping spider remains into a dustpan—finally purging my basement. As I sifted through outdated clothing, old files, and an assortment of phone chargers, I stumbled upon the box.

I pulled at the interlocking cardboard flaps. Worn and soft with age, they slipped open easily. Inside, brightly colored ribbons shone under the lights. I smiled, reaching inside and pulling out a fistful of memories. Turning the ribbons over in my hands and without looking at dates, I could almost guess the year of each one just by the skill of the penmanship.

There were ribbons for Jessie, an unregistered Quarter-type pony, who for 25 years now has rested peacefully on my parents' farm in Charlestown, Indiana. There were ribbons for Snake, a palomino Quarter Horse mare and my 4-H project, whom we lost to a stroke on Thanksgiving in 2000. And ribbons that Roanie, a red roan Quarter Horse gelding, had won when he was just 4. Now 27, he's been part of the family for more than half my life.

Under the ribbons was a single piece of yellowed paper bearing the number 92. On the back of the number card, printed in an 11-year-old's hand, was "First Show, June 26, 1982."

'Just for Fun'

Ah, yes. The day came flooding back.

Though I'd spent my childhood weekends on a pony—following my horse-crazy mother down roads, creek beds, and wooded trails—this day was different. On this overcast summer morning, my mom and I accompanied friends to a local horse show at the Georgetown (Indiana) Optimist Club. "Just for fun," my mother told me.

Ginger, my 13-hand unregistered Appaloosa pony, was a packer. A solid 12-year-old, she could navigate any stream, hill, or obstacle. Nothing fazed her—not traffic, dogs, or trash cans. Still, a show pony she was not. Undaunted, my mother paid $2 to enter me in a pleasure class, telling me simply to do what the announcer instructed.

You know how there's always one kid who stands out for all the wrong reasons? I was that kid. The one whose pony laps everyone else—on the wrong lead. The one who can't get her pony to back up. The one wearing the carnival cowboy hat.

All the same, I won a ribbon that day. It was a white one, and I'm pretty sure it was for last place, but it didn't matter. I was hooked. More than 30 years later, I gazed at the back of that exhibitor number, recalling how my mother had pinned it to a borrowed plaid shirt that was several sizes too large for me.

I also remembered what the concept of "first show" had meant to me. Even at 11, I knew the implications and was bold enough to declare "first" proudly in writing. This was my debut competition, but I dreamed of another, and another. In my little-girl heart, I knew that show was only the beginning.

Photo by Kimberly Evans

Good Rides, Good Times

Those days, like that pony, are long gone. My mother has passed on. That arena is now a parking lot. But my love for horses is the same. And now, just like then, I'm always eagerly awaiting the next show.

These days I ride my reining horse, Blackie, in preparation for show seasons that have given us good rides and good times across five states. After a recent ride, I brought him a carrot and knelt to rub down his legs. He lowered his head and nuzzled me, searching for another treat, his gentle eye meeting mine in a moment of kindness.

That bond between horse and human is ineffable. Friends as well as partners, we trust one another. We communicate through body language and sometimes almost a sixth sense. We work, learn, and grow together.

As riders, we hope our performances will be rewarded with applause and blue ribbons. Deep down, though, we know the best reward is simply a good ride.

I placed the box back on the shelf. Some other day, when I'm again feeling nostalgic, I'll return and open it and take in the colors once more. I'll hear the announcer call our names, and then my mother's praise in my ear. I'll smell that sweet equine scent, and smile as I recite the name of every horse I've ever loved, remembering a little girl who dared to dream of another show. □

Diane Staton is a freelance writer in Harned, Kentucky. Her current gelding, Banjos Black Cat ("Blackie"), has been her reining partner for four years. Staton lives with her significant other, Barry Haynes, on his family farm, where they enjoy riding and showing reiners. "We also love country living and our friends," she says.

Have a poignant, humorous, or educational story to share? E-mail **jfmeyer@aimmedia.com**; 675-word maximum.





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Photo by Mallory Beinborn

WE'D LOVE TO OWN

Royal Claybury Great Balls Of Fire

Details: 2012 American Miniature Horse Association and PtHA gelding by Royal Viking Spirit and out of Royal Pretty Special, by Royal Firecracker.

Barn name: Sparky.

Owned and shown by: Lucy Lewis of Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

He's got spark: Lewis, age 15, chuckles at her horse's registered name. "It's a long name for such a small horse." What he lacks in size, at 9 hands high, he makes up for in character. "He has a lot of personality," Lewis shares. "He's always playing—once, I turned him out with my trainer's POA to play. He jumped and kicked up and was so high he flipped himself over. He looked around as if he were checking to see if anyone saw him. Then he kept running around."

Mighty mini: Lewis has been showing for years with her full-size PtHA gelding, and Sparky's her first mini. "We compete in halter," she explains. "But this year he's going to learn how to drive." At the 2015 PtHA world show, Lewis and Sparky won the youth miniature halter class. "We compete in halter, trail in-hand, and hunter in-hand. Next year, we'll try driving, depending on his progress." The expectations and rules for an in-hand class are similar to the corresponding under-saddle class. "He also jumps," Lewis shares. Quite high, in fact. "My trainer placed third in the open in-hand jumping at the PtHA World Show."

Toddler toter: Though Lewis can't ride Sparky, he's no stranger to hauling kids around on his back. "We've put my trainer's kids on him. He doesn't know what's going on, but he stands quietly for them."

Horse, human companion: "He's so cute that everywhere we go people stop to ask about and love on him," Lewis confides. "He's really affectionate. It's like having a little buddy around. He likes my attention and lets me hug him." Sparky may be the perfect human companion, but Lewis' horse Gator doesn't share the affections for him. "He gets jealous," chuckles Lewis.

...Alexis Bennett



The donkey Smoke, adopted by U.S. Marines in Iraq (inset), now lives in Nebraska and helps wounded warriors.

A Donkey's Tale

Have you heard of Smoke, the donkey adopted in 2008 as a pet by lonely Marines deployed in Fallujah, Iraq? The friendly fellow got his name from his color—and the fact that he once snatched a cigarette from a Marine. Smoke's military buddies returned home in 2009, and in 2011 a combined effort of the SPCA and retired Marine Col. John Folsom brought Smoke home, too. He now resides at Folsom's home in Omaha, Nebraska, where he serves as a therapy animal for the Wounded Warrior Family Support organization. Smoke's remarkable story is chronicled in *Smoke the Donkey: A Marine's Unlikely Friend*, to be released in April by Potomac Books (**smokethedonkey.com**).

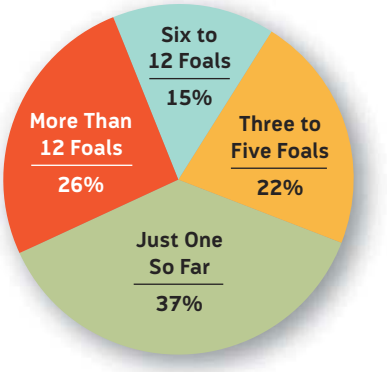
EDUCATIONAL SYMPOSIUM, TOO

600

Number of riders expected to compete at the 2016 Interscholastic Equestrian Association National Finals, to be held at the Kentucky Horse Park, in Lexington, April 20–24. IEA is for students in grades six through 12 who ride Western or hunt seat; you needn't own a horse to join (**rideiea.org**).

Q: Where can I find information about homes for unwanted horses?

A: At the impressive new Web site of the Unwanted Horse Coalition. In addition to links to facilities that take unwanted horses, you'll find questions for potential horse owners, guidelines for owning responsibly, and options to consider when you can no longer care for a horse or need to euthanize one (**unwantedhorsecoalition.org**).



GALLOP POLL

How Many Foals?

Of readers who've owned mares that gave birth, we asked how many foals they'd "had" so far. Above is a breakdown of the responses we received. (To participate in future polls, "like" us at our Facebook page.)



Great Idea: Boot Camp

Amateur exhibitors at last November's Paint World Show had the chance to make last-minute improvements to their skills with the help of industry professionals. The American Paint Horse Association's Amateur Boot Camp offered, for a small fee, one-on-one time with coaches who prepped exhibitors for showmanship, Western horsemanship, or hunt seat equitation. The 51st annual Paint World, which took place over 11 days in Fort Worth, Texas, saw class entries grow by 13 percent—the third year in a row for an uptick (**apha.com**).

"A Donkey's Tale" main image AP photo/Nati Harnik, inset image AP photo, both courtesy of John Folsom; "Great Idea: Boot Camp" photo by Alannah Castro/*Paint Horse Journal*

Infection-Fighting Wrap

The lowdown: Corona Pure-Flex cohesive bandage helps keep your horse's wounds bacteria-free as well as covered and protected. The new wrap has built-in antimicrobial Microban, which helps prevent the growth of stain- and odor-causing bacteria.



Useful for: Wound or injury dressing, post-surgical sites, securing standing bandages, hoof wrapping, supporting tendons.

For details: Speak to a Manna Pro dealer. Find yours at **mannapro.com/where-to-buy**.

MORE PREVALENT THAN THOUGHT?

75%

Proportion of healthy horses likely exposed to leptospira, according to a recent study by Zoetis. The pharmaceutical's Lepto EQ Innovator is the first vaccine licensed for use in horses to prevent leptospirosis. (Visit **leptoequinnovator.com** to assess your horse's risk.)

TO ALERT, EDUCATE

'This contribution signifies federal recognition of how important the Equine Disease Communication Center is to the industry, and the role the horse community plays in preventing infectious diseases.'

...Dr. Nat White of Virginia Tech, referring to the USDA's financial commitment to an initiative of the American Association of Equine Practitioners and the American Horse Council. The communication center will be a national hub of information for equine disease reporting, similar to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for humans (**horsecouncil.org**).



It's never too early to start modeling safe horse-handling behavior for a child.

Safety First—From the Start

If you have horse-crazy children or grandchildren, it's never too soon to start modeling horse-safe behavior for them. As all experienced horsemen know, small things can go a long way to reduce the risk of getting injured (the horse's risk, too). Studies consistently show—not surprisingly—that those with more knowledge about horse behavior plus experience in handling horses are at lower risk of injury than are novices. Children and adolescents especially need careful supervision to ensure that they're developing the habits that will keep them safe in the saddle and around the barn. (For a handy list of precautions, see "Safety Rules Around Horses" at **HorseandRider.com**.)

Q: I hear a lot lately about the danger of sugar in a horse's diet. Why is sugar harmful?

A: Your horse's digestive tract is designed to digest and absorb feed slowly. Feeds too high in starch and water-soluble carbohydrates (sugars) are absorbed quickly, potentially causing sudden changes in blood glucose and insulin levels, or upsetting the flora and pH balance of the hindgut. This can be a particular problem for horses that are overweight, have insulin resistance/equine metabolic syndrome, or suffer chronic laminitis. Ask your vet or equine nutritionist to help you decide on the best feed formulation for your horse.

Source: Kentucky Equine Research

"Safety First—From the Start" photo by Alana Harrison

SOLUTIONS



Resistol offers the only felt hat on the market featuring the fit, feel, and look of a Western hat, coupled with the safety features of a riding helmet.

Safety Plus Western Style

The problem: Your Western style aesthetic and your desire for head protection while riding don't agree.
The solution: Resistol's Ridesafe Western hat.
Details: Bring together your Western style with optimal safety features with the Resistol Ridesafe headgear. It's the only felt hat on the market featuring the fit, feel, and shape of a Western hat as well as the safety and protection of a riding helmet. The hat can be shaped, just like your regular felt hat.
More info: Available spring 2016; visit **resistolridesafe.com** for more details.

Storage Savvy

Looking for ways to store your tack to keep it clean and safe from damage? See *Rider Gear* on page 64 for items to consider, as well as storage tips.



Comfort on the Trail

Combining years of product development and volumes of feedback from trail riders, Tucker Saddles has developed the Horizon Series of saddles.



The Tri-Tech Fit System combines saddletree and skirt flexibility, along with shock absorption at the saddle's bars for your horse's optimal comfort. An ergonomic, shock-absorbing seat eliminates pressure points in the saddle. On top of those comfort-based traits, English bridle leather offers a supple feel and stainless-steel hardware resists moisture and the elements encountered on the trail.

Visit **tuckersaddles.com** for more information and pricing.

Be Disaster-Ready



During disaster-relief efforts in Colorado following wildfires and flooding in recent years, the Colorado Horsecare Foodbank realized that many horse owners hadn't prepared their animals for evacuation situations. That led them to produce a 10-minute video offering tips to make evacuations easier. They offer catching, handling, trailer-loading, and other valuable tips to increase the odds of a successful evacuation. Find the video at **horsefoodbank.org**, under the "Resources" tab.

Duct Tape to the Rescue!

Duct tape comes in all kinds of colors and patterns these days. Here are just a few uses for the irreplaceable item that can fix just about anything.

Personalize Everything	Pole Patterns	Rapid Repairs	Stall ID
Choose a color or pattern for each horse or rider to label buckets, brushes, gear bags, and spray bottles.	Mark off distances on poles and add visual interest to keep horses and riders engaged during lope- and trot-overs.	Temporarily fix a torn blanket on the fly with a duct-tape patch that covers the hole vertically and horizontally.	Choose a barn color, and then make labels for each horse's stall at the show or other event for easy-to-remove ID.

Foal Coming? Prep That Stall

Here's how to set up a safe, efficient place for your mare to give birth to her foal.

If you have a mare that will foal this spring, here's advice on setting up a foaling stall from Barb Crabbe, DVM. (Dr. Crabbe is *H&R*'s consulting veterinarian and author of *The Comprehensive Guide to Equine Veterinary Medicine*.)

Start early. Introduce your mare to her foaling environment at least 30 days prior to her expected delivery date. This allows her to get accustomed to it, plus exposes her to any potential infectious organisms there so she can produce antibodies (which she'll pass to the foal in her milk).

Determine location. Ideally, the stall should be at least 12 feet by 24 feet in size to allow plenty of room for your mare to get up and down without becoming cast. Two doors are best, as they'll allow access to the stall even if your mare lies down in front of one door. Locate the stall in a quiet, well-ventilated (but not drafty) part of your barn. (*Note:* Foaling in a clean, grassy paddock is also acceptable, though it can make monitoring the mare more difficult. Make sure the fencing is foal-proof and the baby can't roll under it.)

Assure safety. Solid stall walls (no gaps) are best; they prevent little hooves from getting caught. Check for protruding nails, hooks, and splinters. Pad any hard surfaces (such as concrete footings), and make sure the stall floor is level and nonslip. Place the water source off the floor where baby can't stumble into it. Strive to set things up so there's nothing (e.g., feeders) for the foal to bump into in those first wobbly moments.



Straw is the best bedding for a foaling stall, providing great cushioning and no pesky small bits for baby to inhale.

Clean, bed properly. Wash and disinfect the stall prior to foaling (see box). For bedding, use straw, which cushions well and has no small particles to contaminate or irritate the foal. (Nonslip rubber mats help here. If the straw seems too slippery over your mats, place a layer of wood shavings under deeply bedded straw.)

Plan lighting. A 25-watt bulb overhead in an aisle outside the stall allows you to check on your mare without disturbing her. When you need more light, switch to a 100-watt bulb, preferably over the stall. (A battery-powered camp lantern can work if you don't have electricity in your barn. Avoid clamp-on lights and extension cords, both of which are fire hazards.)

Consider a camera. An inexpensive video camera (from a big-box store) can be accessed through your smart phone; it helps you keep watch in those times when you're away from the barn. □

HorseandRider.com
Find a handy foaling checklist at the Web site.

How to Disinfect a Stall

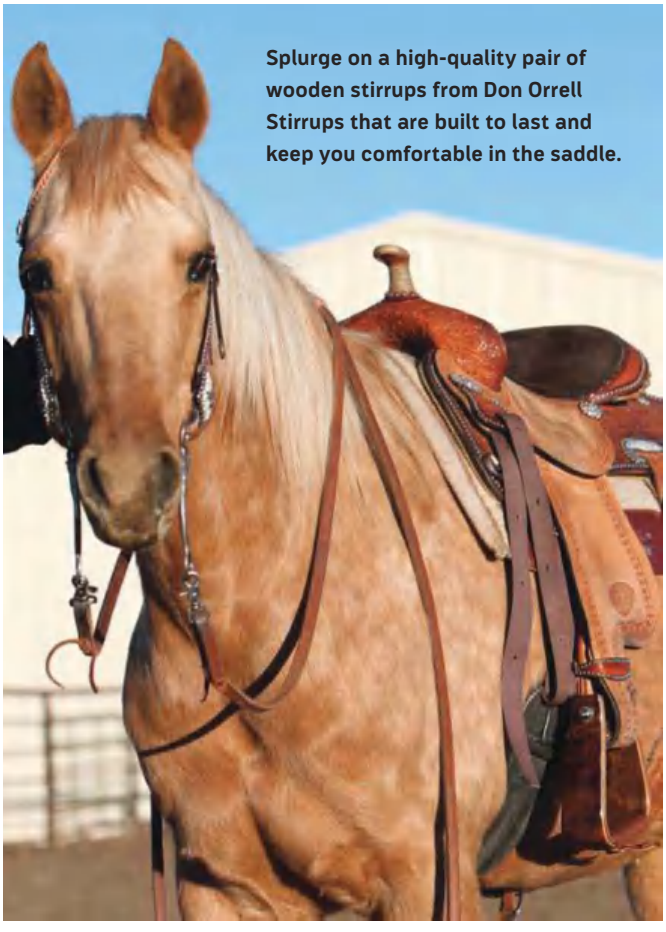
Remove all bedding, buckets, and feeders. Using a mixture of hot water and powdered laundry detergent, scrub buckets and feeders, rinse thoroughly, and allow to air-dry. Then scrub with a solution of one part laundry-type chlorine bleach to 10 parts water; allow to air-dry without rinsing.

Sweep cobwebs, dust, hay, etc., from the stall floor, walls, ledges, and door(s). Scrub walls and other solid surfaces using a pressure washer (or garden hose), a stiff scrub brush, and detergent; rinse and allow to air-dry.

Mix Lysol disinfectant concentrate (2½ tablespoons per gallon of water) in a garden-type spray tank. Wear protective clothing, including long sleeves and pants, gloves, goggles, mask, and head covering. Spray a soaking mist of the disinfectant solution onto all surfaces; allow to air-dry. Repeat.

Return clean buckets and feeder to the stall; place clean bedding.

Photo by GomezDavid/IStockPhoto.com



Splurge on a high-quality pair of wooden stirrups from Don Orrell Stirrups that are built to last and keep you comfortable in the saddle.

A Leg Up

The item: Gunstock walnut angled stirrup from Don Orrell Stirrups.
Fashion to function: The 3-inch-wide, angled construction keeps your riding boot firmly and comfortably in place. The stirrup material is classy-looking and durable, and available in a variety of wood types.
Bonus: The design aligns your foot parallel to the ground to alleviate ankle, knee, and hip pain.
More info: $185; **donorrellstirrups.com**.

Everyday Aztec

Showcase your Western-fashion flair during a night out or at the office with the Diamonds and Gasoline blouse from Woolies Quality Clothier. The feminine top features Western-inspired, sequin-Aztec-detailed yokes and pockets, and is available in two rich colors: maroon (shown) and mocha.

More info: $36; (801) 913-6734; **wearwoolies.com**.





Gear for Youth

The 13-inch seat top grain smooth leather youth saddle by Double T is the ideal outfit for a young, up-and-coming showman. Its classic style and subtle floral tooling is appropriate for day-to-day or show-pen riding. Adjustable stirrups and full quarter horse bars accommodate rider growth and a full-size mount.

More info: $259.95; **texansaddles.com**.

Style Tip: Saddle Up!

To ensure that you get your money's worth out of a youth saddle, use these buyer-savvy tips to guide your shopping quest.

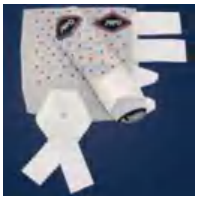
Keep resale in mind. Although a fully tooled, silver-flourished saddle looks great, the price point isn't realistic for most youth-saddle buyers.

Think multi-purpose. A handsome, well-made saddle will endure the wear and tear of daily riding and can be cleaned up for a performance.

Light, neutral, dark. Consider the color of most of your leather goods before making a purchase to avoid a mismatched look. (If most of your tack is light-oil leather, don't purchase a dark-oil saddle.)

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Style: PRO bling boot.
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Style: Legacy zebra colorburst.
More info: $79.99; **equibrand.com**.



Professional's Choice
Style: VenTECH elite rose.
More info: $169.95 for four-pack; **profchoice.com**.

"A Leg Up" photo by Alexis Bennett

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Sidepass Around a Corner

Up the ante on a basic maneuver by challenging your horse to sidepass a 90-degree angle.

By **Mark Stevens**,
With **Jennifer Paulson**
Photos by **Jennifer Paulson**



Once you're confident in your horse's ability to sidepass, it's time to bring a new challenge to your skill set: sidepassing around a corner. You'll see it called for in trail courses, as well as find it a fun way to challenge your horse's maneuverability. If you're still working on a basic sidepass, visit **HorseandRider.com** this month for tips to master it before trying this version.

You'll need four 6-foot poles, set up to form a square in your arena. (*Note:* You can buy inexpensive 8-foot landscape timbers at a big-box home-improvement store and cut to length.) For this exercise, the rider will demonstrate how to sidepass a 90-degree angle on both the forehand (with the horse's front legs inside the box) and on the hindquarters (with the horse's hind legs inside the box). She's riding one-handed, but begin by using two hands on the reins, or go back and forth as needed. The rider will work both maneuvers to the left; switch the cues to work to the right. Be sure to work your horse in both directions.→

Practice Pen

PRIVATE LESSON



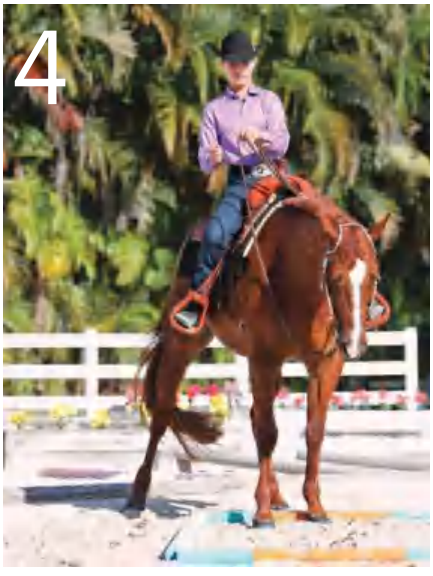




1 Let's begin with the turn on the forehand around the corner. Set your horse up with his front feet inside the box and the pole beneath you, aligned with your hips. This will give you enough room to manage the turn as well as give him awareness of where the pole is underneath him. It's the same placement you'll use to begin the hindquarters turn, just facing outside the box instead of inside.

2 Cue for a sidepass to the left by using pressure from your right foot behind the cinch and placing more weight on the right side of your seat. Lift your hand and use your reins to block your horse from stepping forward and to keep his right shoulder elevated so his right leg can cross in front of his left leg. If your horse hits a pole, keep your cool and relax. Set him up again, and ask him to sidepass.

3 When your horse's front feet reach the corner, lift your left hand slightly to stop the movement of his









front end. Keep your hand in this position to keep his front end stationary as you push his hindquarters around the corner. Pressure from your right leg, placed behind the cinch, will help guide his body around his front end. Be sure that your leg is far enough back to only move your horse's hindquarters.

4 Press your right leg behind the cinch to push your horse's hindquarters to the left all the way around the corner using a press-release rhythm to move one step at a time. Too much continuous pressure could build momentum, leading to a large step that hits a pole and sabotages your horse's confidence. Use your raised hand to block him from moving his front end. Once your horse's body is square over the next pole, continue sidepassing to the left. You can continue all the way around the square, but be sure to stay calm and focused, taking your time with each step.

5 The following steps will help you sidepass a corner with a turn on the hindquarters. Begin with your horse standing squarely over a pole, with his hind feet inside the box and the pole aligned under your hips. Ask him to sidepass the same way you did in Step 2, pressing with your right foot behind the cinch and lifting your rein hand to block his forward movement. Continue down the pole until you reach the corner.

6 To guide your horse around the corner, use pressure from your right leg at the cinch to clearly cue for front-end movement and push his shoulders to the left. Keep your rein hand slightly raised, to the left of the saddle horn, and back to guide his shoulders to the left but still block too much forward movement. In this case, the rider might've pushed too hard with her right leg, resulting in a large step to the left. This could cause her horse to hit a pole. Smaller, methodical steps net correctness.

7 Once you're around the corner, continue sidepassing down the pole to the left until you reach the next corner then execute the maneuver again. Repetition and patience are the keys with both of these maneuvers. If you or your horse gets frustrated, go work on something else and then come back to sidepassing the corner. End the session on a successful note to build confidence and teamwork. □



Mark Stevens trains all-around horses and coaches youth and amateur riders for AQHA competition from his facility just west of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. From beginner riders to world champions, Stevens' goal is the same: To communicate humanely and individually with horsemen and equine partners. Learn more about Stevens' program at **markstevenshorses.com**.

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Be Training-Barn Wise

Common courtesy goes a long way to maintain a positive, professional experience at your trainer's barn.

By **Bob Avila**, With **Jennifer Paulson**
Photos by **Marc Laxineta, DVM**



Treat your trainer how you expect to be treated in professional situations. Always be on time—or better yet, arrive early! Your trainer has a busy schedule with other customers to serve, so respect his time. If you'll be late or need to cancel, call or send a text message as soon as you know about the situation.

We trainers understand that horses are (more likely than not) your hobby. Whether you ride as a serious competitor or are in it for the fun and camaraderie, riding is your extracurricular activity. Some people play golf or tennis; you chose horses.

On the flip side of that coin, your trainer makes his living coaching amateur riders, caring for their horses, and guiding their experiences. Horses are what you do *after* your day job, but training horses and riders *is your trainer's day job.*

I have a few tips for training-barn etiquette that'll keep your hobby fun while also respecting your trainer's profession.

Be on Time

It's really a matter of common courtesy. If you schedule a lesson at 10 a.m., be on time. Or, even better, arrive 10 minutes early! Your trainer's day probably starts early—we're "on the clock" at 6 a.m.—so he doesn't have time to wait around for you. If you'll be late or have to cancel, call or text as soon as you know the situation. That way your trainer doesn't waste time waiting on you. Would you arrive 20 minutes late to a doctor appointment, or blow it off completely without calling? I doubt it.

Along that line, if you want to watch your trainer ride your horse, call first (and be on time). Yours might be the first horse he rides in a day, so if you arrive unannounced after lunch, your horse will have already had his session. If you call ahead, your trainer can move your horse to the agreed-upon time.

Key takeaway: Treat your trainer's operation like the business that it is.

Clean Up After Yourself

Trainers invest a lot of money in their equipment. Bits, bridles, reins, pads, saddles—they're the tools of our trade, just like a carpenter's saws and hammers. Respect our equipment and put it back where you found it. And that doesn't just go for tack; it applies to fly spray, brushes, hoof picks, and any other barn items.

I take excellent care of all of my gear, both to maintain its value and because I don't want to replace things over and over again if I don't have to. I bet your trainer is of the same mind.

If your trainer has a certain way of storing tack or pet peeves about the care of his gear, be aware. I can't stand halters left on the ground in the crossties. My customers appreciate that and (most of the time) they put the halters away before they go ride.

Key takeaway: You expect your kids and officemates to respect your property. Maintain that expectation of yourself at the barn.

Don't Gossip

Every barn has a gossip. The one who airs out their gripes to the help or other customers instead of going to the head trainer. There's always someone who likes to stir the pot. Don't be that customer. Gossip builds resentment between riders and can ruin your barn experience. This is your hobby. It's supposed to be fun, not a soap opera!

Furthermore, if you have an issue, go to your trainer and discuss it immediately. If you feel like your horse

Practice Pen

BOB AVILA'S WINNING INSIGHTS





LEFT: A good customer makes an effort to clean up after himself. For example, if you know barn rules dictate that halters not be left in crossties, then make an effort to put them away every time. RIGHT: Your trainer invests a lot of money in his equipment. Bits, saddles, pads—they're the tools of his trade. Treat his equipment with respect and put things back the way you found them.

is getting short-changed in some way, talk about it. Or if you think there's a problem with your bill, bring it up with the trainer. Don't complain to other customers or assistant trainers. That just causes more problems. Yes, some trainers are harder to talk to than others. But you probably had a good idea about his personality when you put your horse in training with him.

Key takeaway: Don't be the barn gossip. Your reputation will precede you in the rest of the horse world.

Get Involved

It's *your horse*. Be a part of the experience. Come out to watch your trainer ride your open horse or school your non-pro mount. You'll learn from watching in a different setting than a normal lesson. Plus, it fosters a positive relationship with your trainer by showing that you're truly vested in your horse's training.

Key takeaway: Take the initiative to be involved. You pay a lot for this hobby; get the most that you can out of the experience by actively participating in your horse's life.

Pay Your Bill

I'll do the best job I can with my customers' horses. The only thing I expect is to get paid. On time. Would you take your car to get new tires and then tell the shop that you can't pay for them because your mortgage is due? Not likely. Treat your trainer with the same respect.

If you don't pay your bill, then I can't buy feed for your horse or pay my barn mortgage to keep a roof over his head. Running a training barn is very expensive, and nonpayment causes a lot of problems.

Key takeaway: Training and lessons are expensive. Figure out if you can afford it under all circumstances before entering a professional agreement.

Have Expectations of Your Trainer

Keeping a positive barn culture isn't all on the customers. It's a two-way street, and the trainer has to live up to his commitments, too. He should keep you informed about any changes in your horse's progress or in barn protocols. Expect honesty, and if you don't feel like you're getting it, have a discussion immediately. The right trainer will help you set and achieve goals and get to know what you want out of the experience. That's all part of his job; because that's what it is—his professional career.

Key takeaway: Take time to find the right trainer for you and your expectations. □

HorseandRider.com

If you're not yet working with a trainer, Bob Avila shares his tips for finding one and why you should seek expert help on **HorseandRider.com** this month.



A multiple AQHA world champion, Avila has also won three NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurities, the NRHA Futurity, and two World's Greatest Horseman titles. He received the AQHA Professional Horseman of the Year honor. His Avila Training Stables, Inc., is in Temecula, California. Learn more at **bobavila.net**.

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Get a Handle on Hackamores

Hone your horse-headgear knowledge, and learn the ins and outs of the traditional hackamore.

By **Al Dunning**, With **Alexis Bennett**

There's nothing more classically Western than a handsome, well-made hackamore. The bitless setup—which includes a bosal, hanger, and mecate—is used by riders as an everyday riding tool, a training aid, or as a means to transition from a snaffle bit to a bridle. It can drastically improve your horse's training if used correctly.

Here, you'll learn the ins and outs of the traditional hackamore, including its anatomy, use, and best care practices. Equipped with this information, you'll be able to use a hackamore to improve your horse's feel and enhance your horsemanship.

The Setup

The hackamore is comprised of multiple components that can be found in a range of materials and styles. Before you outfit your horse, learn his temperament and preferences, and then choose a hackamore that'll complement him.

The bosal is the oval or teardrop-shaped noseband. It's made of rawhide, rope, leather, or combinations of these, and traditionally has a rawhide core. It's measured in *plaits*, which refers to the number of strands used in the braiding process, and is found in diameters between ½ and 1 inch. The *flex* of a bosal refers to its ability to return to shape after being used or bent.

The mecate is a single line of rope made of horse hair or other material. The 22-foot long rope ties above the heel knot to create reins and an accompanying lead line. You can tie the mecate to adjust the bosal, making the bosal tighter or looser to best fit your horse's nose.

The heel knot is the lower, balancing portion of the bosal that connects the cheekpieces together and sits just underneath your horse's jaw.

The nose button is the portion of the bosal that goes over the bridge of your horse's nose. In bosals where the entire piece isn't made of the same material, the nose button is the thickest, most visible portion. The nose button seen in the first photo is narrow. Because of this, a jowl string can be used to keep the hanger from riding up your horse's face and into his eyes.



The hanger or cheek is the adjustable, soft-leather strap headstall piece that runs behind the horse's ears and attaches to the bosal on either side of his face.

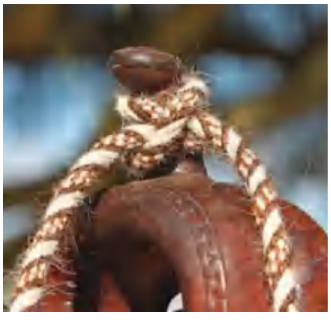
Use

A hackamore applies pressure to your horse's nose by rocking back and forth across its bridge. Because the reins attach to the same location underneath his jaw, clear cues are crucial. Unlike with a snaffle bit, which allows you to use direct rein to cue for lateral movement, the hackamore requires finesse so shouldn't be used as a fix-all for a horse that's unresponsive to a bridle or snaffle bit. But in the right hands, and with a horse that already

Photos by Jennifer Paulson; Al Dunning photo by Charles Brooks



The two-rein, which is similar to the hackamore in setup, is used to transition between the hackamore and the bridle. Using a smaller-diameter *bosalito*, or pencil bosal, keeps the nosepiece from rubbing when placed underneath a bridle. You can ride with two sets of reins, or transition from just using the hackamore to just the bridle reins until your horse is comfortable and responsive to the bridle by itself.





LEFT: There are several ways to attach the lead rope of the mecate to your saddle. You can tie it to your horn (shown is a half-hitch knot, which is the most common method), roll it on your left side or "on" side (shown in the top photo), tie it through the saddle's gullet, or tuck it into your belt. RIGHT: Here I wrapped the mecate through the gullet and then tied it to the horn. This shortens the lead rope so it doesn't drag.

has a sound foundation in his training, the hackamore can help teach your horse to be more free and responsive.

To introduce the hackamore to your horse, first get him accustomed to it on the ground. The feel on his nose will be different than anything he's accustomed to, so allow him to get a firm understanding of how it moves and applies pressure before training in it. Keep in mind that steady, even pulling from both reins will only brace the bosal against the bridge of his nose and eliminate the play or rocking. This'll teach him to brace against the hackamore or become resistant to your cueing, which will undo your training. Instead, use single-side pressure and a supporting neck rein.

Fit

There are three factors to consider when outfitting your horse in his hackamore, including the fit of the bosal or nosepiece, the mecate, and the hanger.

The bosal varies in size, thickness, and pliability. The size that's appropriate for your horse depends on his preference. A light, small-diameter nosepiece is best for feely, sensitive horses. A bigger, stronger bosal is suitable for a horse that needs a little more signal. A bosal with more play on the horse's nose will result in a stronger cue.

The mecate should be tied in a way such that there's enough space in the noseband to allow the bosal to rock back and forth on the horse's nose. The more wraps you put in the mecate (around the heel knot at the bottom of the bosal), the smaller the nose space will be. There should be enough room between the bosal and your horse's face that you can easy slide your index finger in the space. The mecate also shouldn't be tied so loosely that when you pull on the reins, the bosal slides up your horse's face. This won't allow for effective cueing. Allow room for it to slide nearly halfway between your horse's jaw and muzzle for appropriate adjustment.

The hanger should be adjusted so that the nosepiece sits just above the bridge of your horse's nose. If it's too low, it'll restrict his airway; too high and it won't have room to move and transfer cues.

Care

Mindful care and maintenance of your hackamore will ensure that it keeps its shape and lasts. Keep the entire hackamore, including the hanger, mecate, and nosepiece clean. Brush off dirt or hair that's accumulated during your ride, and use rawhide cream on all rawhide pieces.

Before storing, loosen the mecate. If you hang up your hackamore with the mecate still tight, there's a chance that the hackamore will twist and lose its shape. If it tends to become too narrow when left unused, whittle a stick that can be fixed across the inside of the nose and hold it open. Or, store it with the noseband placed around an empty coffee can or oatmeal canister to encourage it to maintain good shape. □



Al Dunning, Scottsdale, Arizona, has produced world champion horses and riders in multiple disciplines. He's been a professional trainer for more than 40 years, and his expertise has led him to produce books, DVDs, and his own online mentoring program, Team AD International (**teamadinternational.com**).

HorseandRider.com

Learn the difference between the direct, indirect, and supporting reins this month at **HorseandRider.com**.

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Margo Ball



Ball holds judge's cards with the Paint, Quarter Horse, and Palomino breed associations and NSBA, NRHA, NRCHA, and WCHA discipline cards. She's judged 19 world shows, including those of AQHA, PHBA, and APHA.

From her Ball's Quarter Horses in Fort Collins, Colorado, Ball breeds all-around horses; trains Quarter Horses for halter, Western pleasure, and ranch riding; and shows in NRHA and AQHA reining and ranch riding events. She also coaches a select group of amateur competitors.

Ball's an AQHA national director and a member of AQHA's Show and Professional Horsemen Committee, serving on the halter subcommittee.

When I look at a class of horses, I want good overall balance and structural correctness. All-around balance is what most affects performance. A horse's shoulders should be long and well-laid-back, and should complement well-sloped hips of equally adequate length. She should have a short, strong topline; good depth to her heartgirth; and a long, trim neck, with a high tie-in to her shoulder.

While this is true of halter horses as well, a performance horse should be structurally correct. Form to function means that no structure is too extreme. This means that while some variation from textbook structure is OK, too much deviation from ideal will cause undue stress to other structures of the body, resulting in poor performance and diminished longevity. Ideally a horse's hocks should be adequately angled so that a straight line can be drawn from the point of her hips through her hocks and straight down through her cannon bones to the heels of her hind feet. Adequate hock angle results in a sound horse that moves efficiently. Her pastern angle should be similar to her shoulder angle and not be excessively long. Long or overly angular pasterns tend to lead to soft-tissue issues.

I want a horse to be attractive, but typically good balance and structure lend themselves to this. In terms of muscling, the main difference between a halter and a performance horse is the expression of the muscle. A riding horse will have a smoother look to her muscling.







Practice Pen

CONFORMATION CLINIC

First: Mare C



All three of the mares in this group are strong. But, Mare C had the best overall balance, which sets her apart. She has long, well-sloped shoulders that are complemented by the length and angle of her hips. Mare C has the best set of withers. They're prominent and carry back well into her topline. This, coupled with her deep heartgirth, will allow her to easily carry a saddle. She has a strong, short back that'll enhance her self-carriage, longevity, and overall performance ability. She's strong through her gaskin and stifles and has more carry-down in the muscling of her hips than the second-place mare. This'll enable good hind-end drive. She has good set and angulation to her hocks, which again will improve her propulsion and hind-leg reach. Her pasterns, though a little short, have the proper angulation to match her shoulders. Pasterns help to absorb shock, so too-long pasterns can predispose a horse to soft-tissue injury; too-short and her stride becomes jarring. Her conformation most lends itself to athleticism and longevity of all the mares in this group.

Second: Mare A



This mare was a close second to the first-place mare, but my determining factor for placement was the angle of her shoulders. Mare A has nice length and angle to her shoulders; Mare C's are just slightly superior. A horse with long, well-angled shoulders will achieve longer strides, which is especially important for gait extension in ranch riding. Her hip angle complements her shoulder angle, and she has a strong topline. Her short, strong back will help her with self-carriage and will also enable her to make nice, snappy turnarounds. Mare A is a little lighter in the gaskin and stifle than the first-place mare, but she's still adequate for performance purposes. She also has less carry-down into her hocks, which will affect her hind-end propulsion. In this photo it appears that her hind pasterns are slightly longer than her front pasterns, which could stress her hind legs over time.

Overall, she's a very attractive mare with good balance and structure. Her head and face are feminine, and she has a kind eye. I like a performance horse to have a soft eye, as it typically indicates good disposition.

Third: Mare B



Mare B is also a high-quality individual. In comparison to the other two mares she lacks in a few areas. First, she's the thickest in her throatlatch. This affects ease of flexion. Her neck ties into her shoulders lower than in the other two mares, though all of the mares have a slightly low shoulder-to-neck tie-in. Her withers are the least prominent. She's a little shallow in her heartgirth. The angle and length of her shoulders and hips are adequate. She has nice muscle carry-down into her hocks, similar to the first-place mare, which likely allows her to have good hind-end drive. She's also strong across her topline and her loin, which improves her longevity and self-carriage. Her pastern angle is steeper than the other two mares' pasterns in this class, but still match the angle of her shoulders

She's a nice-looking mare and is likely an athletic individual due to her quality balance and structure. This group of mares is very evenly matched, so any mentioned faults are minor

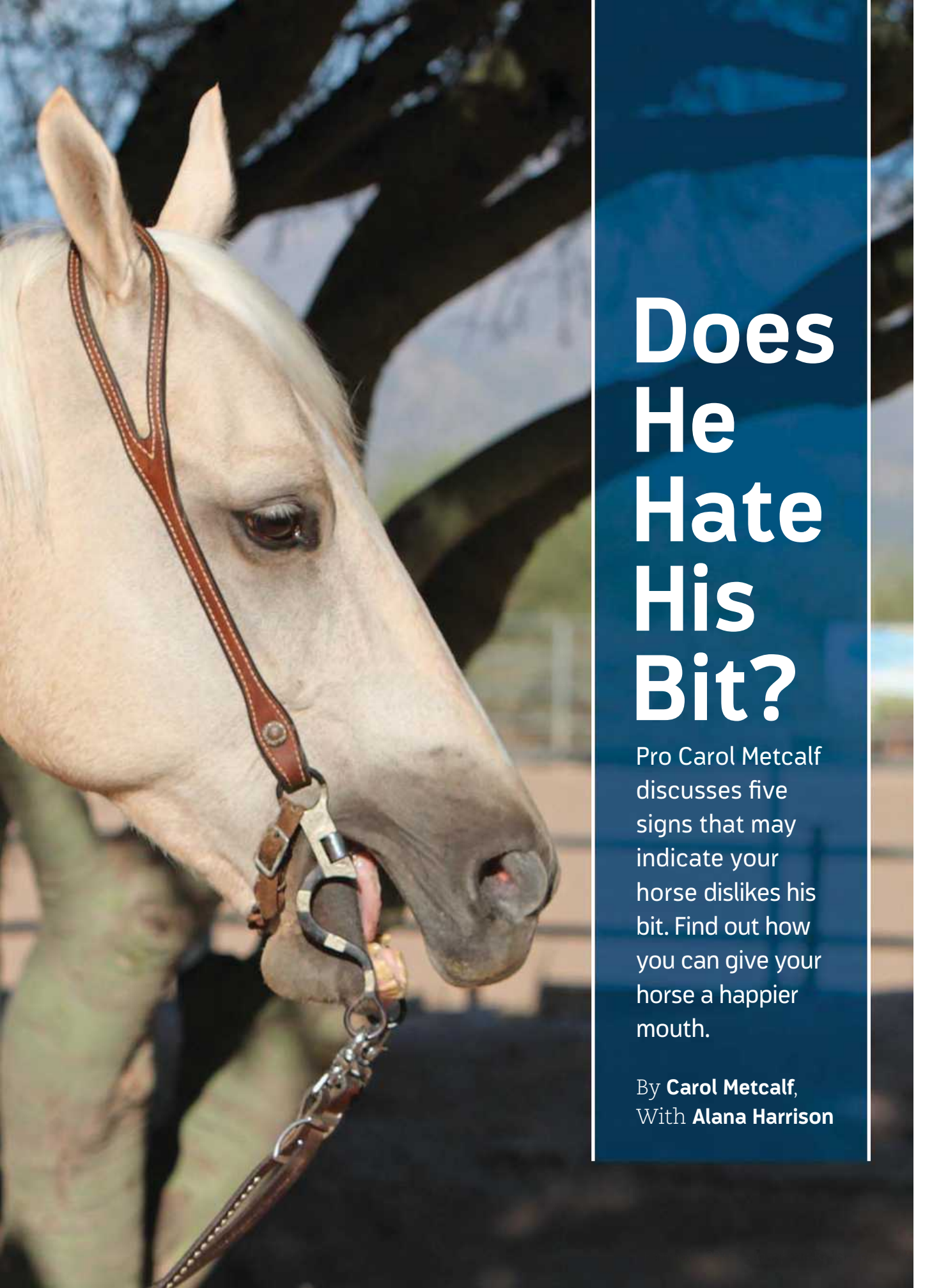
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Photo by Jennifer Paulson



Does He Hate His Bit?

Pro Carol Metcalf discusses five signs that may indicate your horse dislikes his bit. Find out how you can give your horse a happier mouth.

By **Carol Metcalf**, With **Alana Harrison**

IF YOU'VE EVER WALKED A MILE WEARING SHOES THAT WERE TOO SMALL OR TOO big or just downright painful, you have an idea of how your horse feels in the "wrong" bit. And I'd bet that when you were walking in those shoes, you did your fair share of complaining—so you can understand why your horse might protest when trying to do his job in an ill-fitted or unsuitable bit.

Finding the right bit for your horse is not only vital to his health and comfort, it's essential for effective communication and to your overall success as a team—whether you're in the show ring, on the trail, or are trying to accomplish a specific training goal in your backyard. Plus, you'll find that the right bit makes for a happy horse, which, in turn, will increase his willingness and confidence.

Here, I'm going to address five signs that could indicate your horse isn't a happy camper in his current bit. For each, I'll explain the possible bit problem, offer a few solutions to consider, and provide insight on what else might be causing your horse's behavior.

Sign #1: Head Tossing

Your horse throws his head up and down or from side to side at a standstill or when you cue him to move forward, backward, or turn.

Possible bit problem: The bit could be causing pain or irritation on the bars (the gum or inter-dental area between the front teeth and the molars) or on the corners of your horse's mouth. And sometimes a bit can pinch or apply excess pressure to only one side of the mouth. If, for example, your horse tosses and pulls his head to the right when you take hold of the reins, he might be experiencing discomfort on his right bar. A bit that's the wrong size or the wrong type for the shape of your horse's mouth could be the cause of irritation on his bars or corners.

Considerations: Carefully examine the inside and outside of your horse's mouth for any signs of bruising, redness, or sores. If you discover any indications that he's in pain, stop riding and schedule an appointment with your vet to determine the best treatment and how much time off your horse may need. After your horse has recovered (or if there were no signs of injury to his mouth), focus on slowing and softening your hands and rein aids as you go about your regular riding routine before reaching for a different bit. If your horse continues to toss his head, consider trying a different bit, but keep in mind that going to a bigger or more severe bit is usually never the answer. In this case especially, a milder bit may prove helpful. If, for example, you're using a solid bit, try a smooth-mouth snaffle—this bit could eliminate any excess pressure on the bars or corners of your horse's mouth.

Possible other causes: A horse that's especially stiff or resistant in his ribcage will sometimes toss his head in response to a rider's leg pressure. If your horse seems to throw his head the moment you apply your leg, work on suppling him through his ribcage by asking him to bend his head and neck through circles and on straight lines to remind him that when you apply leg pressure, he should willingly respond and soften to you.

Sign #2: Bridle Evasion

Your horse avoids being bridled by lifting his head up, refusing to open his mouth for the bit, or backing away.

Possible bit problem: The bit may be exacerbating an existing dental problem. Points, sharp edges, and hooks develop on a horse's teeth over time and can cause painful sores on the inside of his mouth, and a bit can further irritate these sores, especially if it's too large or ill-configured for the shape of your horse's mouth. Another possibility is that your bridle isn't properly adjusted, which will prevent the bit from resting correctly in your horse's mouth. If the cheek pieces are overly short, the bridle will pull the bit too tight in his mouth, which could cause pinching (and even tearing) at the corners or irritation on the palate. If the cheek pieces are too long, the bit will hang low in your horse's mouth and could bump against his teeth; and if the cheek

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pieces are unevenly adjusted, the bit could rub or pinch any number of places in his mouth.

Considerations: Schedule a dental exam with your vet or a qualified dental technician to address any teeth issues your horse might have that could be interfering with the bit. Make sure your bridle is properly adjusted so the bit is resting in his mouth correctly. With a snaffle bit, you should see one wrinkle at the corners of your horse's mouth; a leverage bit will hang slightly lower in the mouth than a snaffle, but not so low that it's bumping against any of his teeth.

Possible other causes: If your horse is particularly irritable when you go to place the bridle over his ears, he could be suffering from ear mites, a tick or insect bite, or another condition on his ears. Bridle evasion can also be a learned behavior that your horse adopted over time due to a negative experience. For example, if you or another handler frequently jammed the bit in his mouth every time you went to bridle him, he might anticipate pain just at the sight of the bridle. And lastly, your horse may have learned that he can get out of work if you can't get the bridle on him, especially if you've given up on occasion and put him back in his stall after an unsuccessful attempt.

Sign #3: Chomping on the Bit

Your horse chomps or grinds on the bit while standing still, in motion, or both.

Possible bit problem: This behavior could indicate that the bit is too narrow for your horse's level of sensitivity and therefore could be pinching on the corners of his mouth. Bit chomping can also be a sign that the bit doesn't fit the inside of your horse's mouth properly. Horses' mouths vary in size and shape, so the same bit will fit a little differently in every horse's mouth. For example, if a horse has a very thick tongue, the bit will naturally ride higher in his mouth and could apply unintended pressure to a horse's palate. In my experience, however, horses that chomp on the bit are usually nervous or anxious about something.

Considerations: If you suspect your horse is anxious, try him in a bit with a roller in the mouthpiece. Nervous horses tend to "play" with the roller with their tongues, which often helps alleviate anxiety. Also, be sure to evaluate your body language. If you're nervous in the saddle, your body is naturally going to be rigid and your cues may feel jerky or rushed, which could add to his anxiety. And, finally, consider any other reasons your horse might be nervous—is he in a new environment? Separated from a buddy horse? Does he become more anxious on the trail, away from the barn?

Possible other causes: Sometimes a horse may chomp on the bit out of boredom. If your horse is young or still a little immature, he may have a short attention span. In this case, a roller could also be helpful by giving him something to occupy his mind when he feels bored.

Sign #4: Braces Against the Bit

Your horse consistently feels heavy on his front end and braces against the bit at a jog or lope—or when you ask him to stop.

Possible bit problem: The bit may not be giving you enough leverage for your horse's level of sensitivity. If your horse has any scarring on the bars of his mouth from previous damage, he may be numb or less sensitive to bit pressure.

Considerations: If you're currently using a bit with a straight mouthpiece, try one with a low port. A port will encourage your horse to soften through his poll and lift his front end a little more. Many riders tend to go for more chinstrap (either a thicker, leather one or a chain strap) with horses that brace against the bit; avoid this, as a bigger chinstrap will only bring your horse's head and front end down farther.

Possible other causes: If your horse is out of shape and lacks muscle in his back and hindquarters, he's going to have a more difficult time engaging his hind end to lift his front end. In this case, you need to go back and work on some basic exercises to increase the muscling in his hindquarters. Other times, rider error can cause a horse to brace against the bit. A rider who is stiff in her hands and upper body, for example, will encourage her horse to break at the base of his neck, which in turn pulls his front end down. If you suspect you're guilty of this, try lifting your hands a little higher to ask your horse to soften through the throatlatch and give in his face. And, lastly, some horses are built a little more downhill than others, meaning their hindquarters are more pronounced than their withers. This conformation can make it more challenging for a horse to lift through his front end, but strengthening and suppling his back end can help. →



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Global Bit Tips

- Thoroughly examine your horse's mouth, especially the corners, bars, palate, and chin. If you discover any signs of irritation or injury, call your vet and schedule an exam (above-right).
- If you're uncertain of how the bit should fit in your horse's mouth or about what type of bit would be best for your horse, consult a professional for help.
- Reaching for a bigger bit is almost never the solution to a behavior or bit problem.
- Listen to what your horse is trying to tell you by carefully observing his behavior and noting anything unusual.
- If your horse has recently lost weight, is dropping feed, or has a poor appetite, especially after you've ridden him, schedule an appointment with your vet or an equine dental technician.
- Always be slow and gentle when bridling your horse, especially when putting the bit in his mouth and the bridle over his ears (below-right).
- Any bit can be problematic in the wrong hands. Make sure you're always soft and slow with your hands and rein cues—never jerk or torque the reins.
- Invest in a high-quality bit. Inexpensive, low-quality bits are more prone to chipping and developing rough or sharp edges.
- Retire old or damaged bits. Even high-quality bits can endure wear and tear over time and develop sharp edges or grooves that could cause irritation to your horse's mouth.



Sign #5: Poor Work Ethic

Your horse consistently has a bad attitude when it comes to work. He may pin his ears, wring his tail, or refuse to move off your leg pressure.

Possible bit problem: The bit may be the wrong size or type for your horse's mouth, or it could have developed chips or sharp edges over time that are irritating your horse's mouth. A high-quality bit will have a smooth finish on all joints and edges, and both sides of the bit will be identical in size, shape, and angle. Inexpensive bits are more prone to chips, sharp edges, and rough seams, and they're often not made with the same high-quality alloys that give a good bit strength and resistance to corrosion. Another possibility is that your horse doesn't like the taste of the bit, or he may not be producing enough saliva to feel comfortable in the bit.

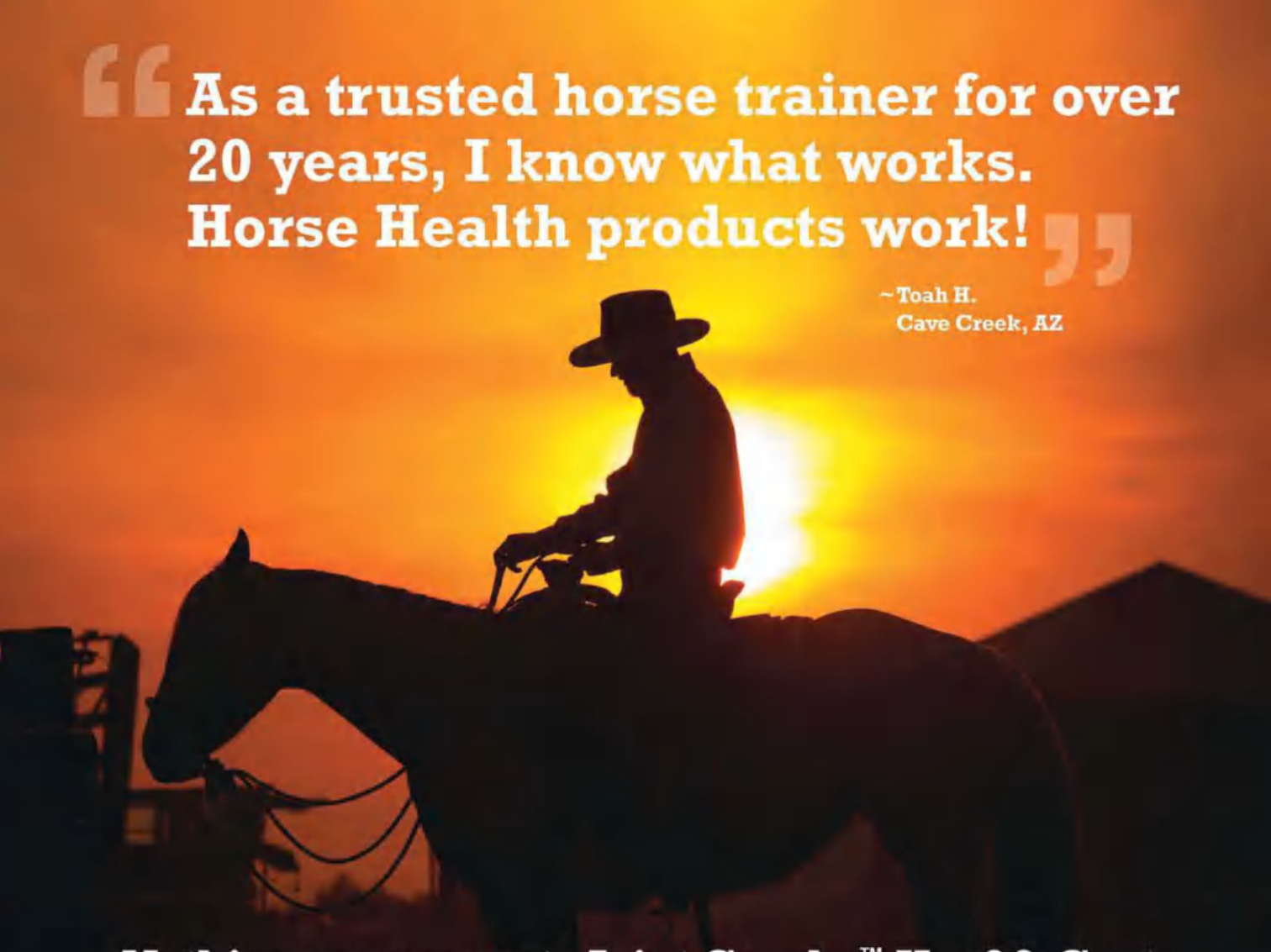
Considerations: Carefully inspect your bit to check for any signs of chipping, grooves, or sharp edges that could be causing your horse pain. If you discover any significant flaws, throw away or permanently retire that bit and invest in a high-quality new one. If you suspect your horse doesn't like the taste of his current bit, consider trying him in a mouthpiece made of sweet iron or copper. Many horses prefer the taste of sweet iron, and copper will encourage salivation.

Possible other causes: Your horse's bad attitude could also be an indication that he's experiencing pain in another part of his body. Poor saddle fit, for example, can quickly cause a horse to develop an aversion to work by making his back or withers sore. Or, he could have sore feet or hocks or splints—there are any number of physical problems that could be causing him pain. If you suspect this is the case, schedule a full exam with your vet. □



Carol Metcalf, Pilot Point, Texas, has earned numerous AQHA world and reserve world titles in Western pleasure, Western riding, reining, and reined cow horse and was named the 2000 AQHA Horsewoman of the Year. She currently coaches youth and amateurs in reining and working cow horse, and owns and operates Metcalf Quarter Horses in Pilot Point, Texas, with her husband, Steven, and son, Carter.

Photos by Alana Harrison



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Riding After a Replacement

Facing a joint-replacement surgery, but afraid you won't get back in the saddle afterward? Three riders share their experiences to offer you encouragement and insight.

By **Jennifer von Geldern** Illustration by **June Brigman**

We worry plenty about our horses' joints, but at some point in life, our own joints may worry us. Age, injuries, and general wear and tear can make joints painful and everyday routines difficult. That's when your doctor might recommend a joint replacement. Your avid-rider heart might sink at the prospect, but that doesn't have to be the case.

Here, we'll share the stories of three riders who've experienced joint-replacement surgery and have returned to riding or plan to. Additionally, a surgeon who specializes in total hip and knee replacements will provide his expertise on what to expect.

New Shoulder, New Hip, Still Cutting

Cutting competitor C.H. DeHaan, age 61, of Scottsdale, Arizona, had his joint replacements in his 50s—a relatively early age for the procedure. Raised on a Kansas cattle ranch and having ridden and shown horses all his life, he maintains it wasn't riding that took its toll on his joints, but rather two other sports.

"I'd injured my shoulder playing basketball and lived with chronic shoulder pain for about 10 years," he says. "During that time, I'd tried arthroscopic surgery to repair it twice, and resorted to cortisone injections in the year leading up to my decision to have the joint replaced. The cortisone injections became less effective each time, though. The idea of replacement was a little scary, but the misery got so bad I finally bit the bullet and had the surgery.

"I also race cars, and about a year prior to my hip replacement I drove in a seven-day, open-road auto race from Guatemala to Texas in a seat that was too small for me," DeHaan continues. "It cut off circulation to my hip, which became necrotic and just deteriorated from there. I spent about a year in pain with the hip, but since I'd had such a great result with my shoulder replacement, I wasn't apprehensive to have the hip done."

DeHaan went to nine or 10 doctors for his shoulder before he found one who told him he could continue the activities he'd been doing before the surgery. "I needed to relieve the pain, which is why most people get these joint replacements, but I also wanted to still live my life and be active," he says.

Key takeaway: Find the right doctor for your situation, one who makes you feel positive about the possible outcome of the surgery.

With his shoulder replaced in June 2011 and his hip later that year in November, DeHaan had a fresh start. His hip recovery was much easier than his shoulder recov-


BRIGMAN



C.H. DeHaan


Darlyne Woodward

ery. The shoulder took two to three months to heal, whereas he was up walking around the same day of his hip replacement, and with the help of physical therapy, swung his leg over a horse only three weeks after that hip surgery.

"Before, the pain in my hip was enough to depress me by the end of a day," he says. "It was hard just to get around. Now, I don't even think about any of it. I've had almost zero pain since having those replacements."

DeHaan is still very active, driving in vintage-car road races, playing racquetball, and competing at cutting events. "When I'm on a cutting horse, I hold onto the horn with my right arm, tucking that arm firmly into my side. It needs to stay steady and solid, and it does."

New Knee, Two New Hips, Still Reining

Darlyne Woodward, age 73, of Carbondale, Colorado, operates Skyline Ranch, a boarding, training, and breeding facility in the Rocky Mountains. She started riding in her 40s and has been riding reining horses for decades.

In Woodward's case, the need for new joints crept into her life through arthritis. "I didn't realize anything was really wrong until I saw a video of myself walking out of the show pen, limping," she says. "Everybody around me was used to seeing me walk like that, but it surprised me. I was about 60 when I noticed that.

"I let myself think it wasn't a big deal, and coped with it," she continues. "Then my right knee started aching and was unable to move freely. I had to actually manually unstick it. I was taking arthritis and pain medication, but also had the knee injected with hyaluronic acid. I got injections three times, but each time, the results would disappear faster."

That's when Woodward realized she needed a more permanent solution.

She had her first replacement surgery on her right knee in October 2012 at age 70. "That was a tough recovery with physical therapy and a long rehab," she confides. But eventually, Woodward's replaced knee was pain-free, with only one lingering riding-related issue. "I had a hard time putting splint and bell boots on my horse," she explains. "Ordinarily, I'd kneel down for that job, but resorted to bending at the waist and having quite a reach. I can kneel on that knee replacement, but it's uncomfortable, and I prefer not to. After a few months, I found I couldn't swing my leg over my saddle. I needed help to move my leg over my horse."

It was her right hip. She tried pain medication but found no relief. One day she found herself unable to lift her right leg over her horse to dismount. She had her right hip replaced in October 2013, one year after her knee replacement. She found recovery relatively easy compared to her knee surgery.

"I did all the physical therapy I was supposed to, and followed the doctor's directions," she shares. "About three weeks in, I was able to ride again and gradually got back to doing reining maneuvers."

Key takeaway: Follow your doctor's orders for a complete, successful recovery. No skipping therapy sessions!

A year later, when her left hip caused her pain, her doctor advised her to replace it, too. A few weeks after surgery, Woodward was back in the saddle.

"I still ride every day and show my reiners," she says. "I compete primarily in Colorado, but go out of state occasionally, too. I still sometimes need a little help getting my leg over my horse, but I'm completely pain-free in

Left photo courtesy of C.H. DeHaan; Right photo courtesy of Darlyne Woodward; Opposite photo courtesy of Sharon Gilbert


Sharon Gilbert

my replaced joints. I get up each day, go to the barn and ride. And for that, I'm thankful."

Two New Knees, Still Recuperating, Still Helping Horses

Sharon Gilbert, 58, of Lafayette, Colorado, has ridden all her life in a variety of disciplines. As an adult, she acquired her "once-in-a-lifetime horse," Manassis, a Quarter Horse-Trakehner cross. Manassis helped Gilbert take her riding to a whole new level, and they enjoyed years of companionship in the arena and on the trail.

Riding isn't Gilbert's only passion. She was also an avid skier and whitewater rafter, plus a riding instructor. Her highly active life eventually caught up with her knees. "I couldn't walk through the grocery store, couldn't go for a hike, and couldn't ride without twisting my body because my knees hurt," she says. "It hurt to carry a saddle to my horse, and mounting was difficult from any height."

After one particularly long day giving lessons at the Colorado Therapeutic Riding Center, Gilbert went home in the worst pain she'd ever experienced. "My arthritis and the bone-on-bone condition of my knees didn't respond to shots or other therapies, and I ended up having to retire from teaching in the therapeutic-riding environment," she says. "My knees simply weren't up to the task anymore." Still committed to the cause, she took a desk job as program manager for the American Hippotherapy Association, Inc.

In 2011 at age 54, Gilbert had her first replacement surgery on her left knee. She toughed out a painful and difficult recovery, complicated by pain medications that made her too sick to continue to take them, yet unable to undergo therapy without them. "I didn't get on a horse until two years after that first surgery, and it was a much more emotional than physical experience," she says.

Key takeaway: Commit to getting back in the saddle, but understand that everyone's situation is different. Your return to riding could take longer and be more emotionally challenging than you expected.

"Even though I had a new left knee, my right knee still impaired my balance and motion, not only when riding but in my daily routine."

In September 2015, Gilbert had her second knee replaced. She was determined to have a better experience that time around. "For my 2015 surgery, my surgeon, his team, and I were much better prepared," she shares. "We had a plan for a different type of pain medication, and now I'm having a much easier, faster, less painful recovery."

As of this writing, Gilbert hadn't been horseback yet. Volunteer work has kept her close to horses and encouraged her to get back in the saddle. "Working and volunteering at Colorado Horse Rescue has given me the incentive to work toward riding again," she confirms. "Horses cared for here, if capable of carrying a rider, benefit from consistent riding, which prepares them for successful and productive lives with adopters. It'll be an exciting return to riding when it happens later this spring." □

HEALING AND HORSES

"It's not uncommon for patients to go home a day or two after hip replacement surgery now," says Jeffrey M. Nakano, MD, an artificial joint surgeon who specializes in hip and knee replacements and performs about 450 replacement surgeries per year. "Some surgery centers even allow patients to go home the same day of artificial hip surgery, but that's not routine for knees. In general, recovery from an artificial knee surgery is longer and more difficult than from artificial hip surgery.

"Unlike a hip, which is a fairly passive recovery in which all you're waiting for is the soft tissue to heal and the bone to heal into the prosthesis, you have to have an active physical therapy program immediately following a knee surgery," Nakano states. "The knee must be forced to bend and straighten—even though it's painful. The patient must be motivated and willing to undergo a certain amount of pain to get that knee moving to recover range of motion and the best result possible."

When patients ask Nakano when they can go back to riding a horse after hip replacement, he tells them about three months. "It may be sooner, and some people recover faster than others, but if you keep three months in mind, I think you won't be disappointed," he says. "After a knee replacement, three months is also a reasonable goal, though the knee is a harder recovery during those three months."

Nakano believes the only reason someone wouldn't be able to return to horseback riding after a joint replacement is if they have other medical issues that prevent it, and that an artificial joint done well should allow them to return to riding. "We suggest avoiding impact activities like running and jumping," he cautions. "The horse can run and jump, but the person shouldn't. I always tell patients to go back to riding, but, obviously, to avoid falling off."

Without unforeseen circumstances leading to damage, most prosthetic implants can last 20 years or more.

HorseandRider.com
Find tips to keep riding in middle age—and beyond—on the Web site this month.

Top Five Conditioning Flubs

Is it time to get your horse in shape? Learn about five common conditioning blunders—and how to avoid them.

Trigger is tired, but you don't know why. Sure, it's been a busy week of showing, but you've been working like crazy to get him fit. He's worked six days a week, and spends an hour every day on the hot walker. When it came time for the most important class of the show, Trigger just plain ran out of gas. He was grouchy, lazy, and didn't want to work. "Is he sick?" you wonder. "Maybe I should call the vet!"

Maybe Trigger's just plain tired! With all of your efforts to get him fit, did you remember to give him a break? If you're an overachiever with a serious goal in mind, it's easy to believe that the harder you work, the better your horse will be. But more's not always better, and it sounds as if Trigger might've fallen victim to a classic conditioning faux pas—overtraining. Does that mean you should just let him sit around? Unfortunately, "not enough" can be a problem too. That's what makes conditioning so complicated.

In this article, I'll review core conditioning principles and how to apply them. Then I'll explore five of the most common conditioning mistakes horse owners make and the problems they cause, plus offer better strategies to use instead.

By **Barb Crabbe, DVM**
Photos by **Jennifer Paulson**

Conditioning 101

What's conditioning? In this case, it describes work you do with your horse to improve his physical ability to perform, whether it's for trail riding, working cows, or running barrels. Different activities require different types of conditioning, but no matter what your horse does for a living, proper conditioning will both improve his capacity for exercise (he can work harder, longer) and reduce the chance that he'll be injured.

When your horse exercises, energy is initially produced in his body through pathways that require oxygen, called aerobic energy. Once that oxygen is used up, your horse turns to an alternative form of energy that doesn't require oxygen to produce, called anaerobic energy. Anaerobic energy requires approximately 10 times the amount of fuel to produce as aerobic energy. When your horse begins to depend on anaerobic energy sources, he'll soon become fatigued.

Conditioning increases your horse's aerobic capacity, meaning he'll use oxygen for a longer period of time before he shifts to anaerobic energy production. This occurs by increasing the amount of blood his heart can pump to deliver oxygen to his muscles, as well as by increasing the actual volume of his blood and the hemoglobin (oxygen-carrying substance) it contains. With proper conditioning, your horse's muscle cells will also increase in size to make room for more energy-production factories, and the density of capillaries (small blood vessels) in his muscles will increase to allow more blood to flow. All of these factors combine for optimal oxygen efficiency, making more fuel available for work.

Aerobic capacity isn't the only thing that changes with conditioning. Improved blood flow also means waste products that build up during exercise and contribute to fatigue



Over-conditioned, under-conditioned, or just right? Planning your horse's conditioning program takes thoughtful consideration of many factors that I'll discuss here.



Be sure that you don't miss the point of your conditioning program. If you're preparing for a lengthy trail ride, strictly working in an arena won't get your horse ready for the rigors of hilly, uneven terrain, nor build his stamina for working in hot, stressful conditions.

will be cleared more easily from your horse's system. Simply put, he'll not only have more energy, he'll fatigue more slowly.

Musculoskeletal effects also play an important role in any fitness plan. With careful work, your horse's tendons and ligaments become stronger and more elastic, cartilage that lines the joints becomes thicker, joints become more flexible, and joint lubrication improves. Even his bones will become stronger over time.

Moreover, sport-specific training means your horse will develop more of the types of muscle fibers needed for his job. For example, sprint training (part of the conditioning plan for a sprinter like a barrel racer, rope horse, or race horse) will increase the number of fast-twitch fibers—muscle fibers that use primarily anaerobic metabolism and produce short bursts of strength and speed.

Finally, thermoregulation (the ability to control body temperature) improves with conditioning. Your horse dissipates heat through two primary mechanisms—breathing and sweating. With conditioning, his lung capacity improves, which will allow him to lose heat more efficiently through his breathing. His increased blood volume helps him sweat without becoming dehydrated, and those same capillaries in muscles that allow for oxygen delivery also help carry blood to the surface of his body to help cool him down.



So what does a conditioning program need to achieve these goals? The following three basic principles apply.

Step-wise training: All carefully designed conditioning programs depend on gradual, systematic increases in stress to body systems. Typically, this begins with a period of "backgrounding" or long, slow distance work. Backgrounding begins with 20 to 30 minutes of walking and trotting at least every other day for six to eight weeks to provide a solid foundation for other work. When additional exercise is added, it should gradually increase in intensity, with periods of rest included to prevent over-training.

Specificity of exercise: Exercises specific to your horse's work demands are also important—again with gradual increases in intensity. For a barrel horse, this might start with one or two short sprints two to three times weekly, gradually increasing to a full barrel pattern after several weeks. For a reining horse, this could include work on individual maneuvers such as stops or spins before introducing a series of maneuvers. For a trail horse, it might involve starting with short trail rides over easy terrain, then gradually increasing the length and difficulty of the trail.

Acclimatization to conditions: No matter how fit your horse is at home, he'll still be in trouble if he has to hit it hard when it's hotter, colder, drier, wetter, or higher altitude than he's conditioned for. The final step in your horse's conditioning program is to consider the environment where he'll face his highest work demands. If you're attending a show in Arizona in December, and hauling in from Minnesota, plan to arrive at least a week or two ahead of time to allow him to adapt. Or if you plan to hit the mountains for a weeklong trail-riding extravaganza, plan on a regular schedule of shorter mountain rides as part of his conditioning plan.

Does getting your horse fit seem more complicated than you thought? You're not alone. Take a look at the following common conditioning flubs and learn how to avoid them.

Missed the Point

Your goal: You hope to take your horse on a five-day trail ride with a group of friends. You'll be out on the trails for several miles each day in a mountainous area, so your horse will need to navigate some fairly steep hills. It's also likely to be hot.

Prep plan: You have a busy life—that's why you're excited about the trip! You generally ride after work, about four days a week, mostly in an arena. You know your horse will need some extra conditioning, so you make a commitment to get to the barn five days a week during the month before your trip. You make sure he's working for at least an hour at every ride—that should be plenty of work to get him fit.

What's wrong: Your horse may be fit for arena work in the cool evening hours, but he's likely to struggle mightily with the hot daytime temperatures, hills, and multiple-hour rides required on your extended ride. You put in the effort to get him fit and have a good start on backgrounding, but forgot to tailor your conditioning program to the specific demands he'll face on this long trail ride. You also failed to give him time to acclimate.

Health alert! Your horse could easily become dehydrated in the heat, putting him at risk for colic or a tie-up episode. His joints, tendons, and ligaments are at increased risk for injury because he's faced with footing conditions and work demands he's not prepared for. Finally, long days of carrying a saddle could put him at risk for cinch galls or other tack-related injuries.

Fix it: Your five-day-a-week at-home plan is great and will definitely help to give your horse a good conditioning base. Try to include at least a weekly (twice weekly would be better) trail ride in conditions that mimic what he'll experience on your longer ride, including heat, higher altitude, and uneven ground. With your busy life it might not be possible to take your horse to the ride location a week ahead of time to acclimate, plan to gradually increase each ride's difficulty.

Too Much Too Soon

Your goal: You're so excited about your weanling filly. She's beautiful, sweet, and moves like a dream. You've never had such a quality youngster in your barn, and can hardly wait to hit the halter and longe-line futurities next year. →



An over-conditioned horse can get "on the muscle" and pushy to start, but then find himself sore and resentful as his show season goes on. Other side effects include mental burnout and exhaustion.

Prep plan: You carefully formulate her diet with plenty of alfalfa, a high-energy concentrate mix, and the vitamins she needs to grow. You know she has to be fit and strong to show well on the longe line, so you plan a schedule of longeing five days each week.

What's wrong: Your filly is just a baby—with soft bones, immature cartilage, and a child-like mind. While a little bit of work to "teach her the ropes" will be required, conditioning too hard for halter and longe-line futurities is a recipe for disaster. Overfeeding and a rigorous conditioning schedule are likely to turn beautiful and sweet into fat, grouchy, and sore. If you really push too hard, your perfect filly could easily become a permanently broken adult.

Health alert! Overfeeding can contribute to a host of developmental orthopedic disorders including both epiphysitis (inflamed growth plates), osteochondrosis (abnormal bone development that can result in serious joint problems), and contracted tendons. Overwork puts even more stress on immature bones, joints, and soft tissues that can make problems even worse. Finally, a rigorous training schedule for a baby is akin to putting your gifted 8-year-old into college courses—it may simply blow her mind.

Fix it: Prepare your baby for halter and longe-line classes with a perfect balance of training and rest. Most successful longe-line trainers don't even teach their babies to longe until they're close to a year of age—and once they've learned the basic skill, there's no need to drill. Instead, youngsters often live outside where their day-to-day activity is all the exercise they really need. Three months before the competitions begin, 10 to 15 minutes of work three days a week will get your filly plenty fit without causing stress. A carefully balanced diet, often including a mix of alfalfa and grass hay with a ration balancer, will ensure that she gets the nutrients she needs, but won't be overfed. And finally, recognize that some babies just don't want to do it. If yours needs too much work to train, you'd be wise to save her for her riding years instead.

Over-Conditioning

Your goal: You just finished penciling out your show season, and this is the year you get to go for it! You'll start in spring with a series of local schooling shows to get your horse in shape, then plan to hit the big-time shows so you can accumulate points to qualify for a year-end show or title. You've been saving for years, and you're prepared to log however many miles it takes to reach your goal. It's a dream come true!

Prep plan: You know this rigorous plan will be hard on your horse, and that he'll have to be in the best physical shape of his life to hold up for the long, hard season ahead. You plan to begin with a schedule of gradually increasing

Spirit of the Wild Wall Clock by Chuck DeHaan



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If you like to keep your riding casual, just be sure that you don't make your horse a victim of under-conditioning. Even an experienced horse needs light conditioning for easy, occasional trail rides.

long, slow distance work. By March you'll be able to add three days of vigorous training. And you'll make sure he spends at least an hour each day walking on the hot walker. Your horse is going to be fit!

What's wrong: You make it to the first horse show, and your horse is fit, all right. So fit, in fact, that you have to longe him for an hour every morning just to get him quieted down enough to make it to the ring. By your fourth show, he seems a little sore. By number six, he decides he doesn't want to play—he balks at the gate, wears a sour face around the ring, and when it comes time to pick up the lope he flat says "no."

Your horse is over-trained. Although your intentions were good, you forgot to temper your aggressive conditioning plan and give your horse a break.

Health alert! First and foremost, over-conditioning leads to mental burnout. An exhausted horse won't be at his best. And if he's so fit he requires the "longe-until-dead" routine to be quiet enough to compete, he's also at risk for musculoskeletal problems such as tendon and ligament strains or degenerative joint disease from excessive stress.

Fix it: Give him a break! Allow your horse at least one day off each week, with longer breaks of several days after competitions, long hauls, or vigorous training. Once you've achieved a solid base of fitness, he shouldn't need many hard training days between events. Consider a trail ride instead.

Under-Conditioning

Your goal: You don't have a strict agenda for your horse. You like to trail ride on occasional weekends with your friends. You usually turn him out for winter months, then knock off the mud when it's time to ride.

Prep plan: Your horse is an older Quarter Horse gelding, and he's always been an easy keeper. He's well behaved, and doesn't need much work. He's never been anything but a perfect gentleman on the trail. You really don't think you need much of a plan—when summer comes he can come in from the pasture and will be ready to go!

What's wrong: After your first ride of the season, your poor horse can hardly walk. He shuffles out of his stall, and looks plain pitiful standing on the crossties. Problem is, your horse really does need a bit of fitness even for those light trail rides—especially as he's getting older.

Health alert! Imagine how you feel the first time you hit the gym after months of exercise avoidance. Your horse's muscles get *sore*. Your unfit horse is also at risk for tying-up and musculoskeletal injuries like tendon and ligament strains.

Fix it: It doesn't take much to give your weekend warrior a little bit of fitness to help him do his job. An initial period of backgrounding, and three to four light work days each week should be enough to keep him fit for light trail rides.

Forgot the Foundation

Your goal: Your horse has been laid off for the winter, and now it's time to go back to work. You ride mostly for fun, taking a couple of lessons a month from a local trainer and trail riding from time to time.

Prep plan: You know you need to start your horse slowly so he won't get sore, and usually ease back into regular riding with several weeks of walking and trotting until your horse starts to feel stronger. After a month or two, he should be ready for a lesson, and perhaps a light trail ride.

What's wrong: Your casual conditioning plan sounds great. You've included a little bit of backgrounding, and the addition of a lesson and a light trail ride after a month or two is the perfect way to add that "sport-specific" conditioning to his work. But did you remember to consider his basic care? While you're knocking of the winter mud, don't forget to factor in his feeding plan, foot care, and basic veterinary needs.

Health alert! If your horse's feet are soft or out of balance, he can quickly go lame when he starts to exercise. And dental problems can easily lead to mouth ulcers or other injuries when you put that bit back in his mouth.

Fix it: Always remember that good conditioning begins with good overall health. Start by booking an appointment with your farrier to get your horse's feet in shape, then have your vet check basic health-care needs like routine dentistry, vaccinations, deworming, and feeding adjustments. □

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Watch Out for That Tree!

By **Nancy Cahill**, With **Abigail Boatwright**
Photos by **Abigail Boatwright**

Nancy Cahill uses a tree and a box made of poles to help her horses master a supple, collected backup.



This exercise works best when you place poles in a square around a tree, or a visually substantial obstacle like a barrel.

You might think that backing straight lines will put your horse on the path to a solid backup, but I disagree. Backing in a circle encourages suppling and collection and really stretches your horse physically and mentally, which nets big dividends in the long run.

I use a tree at my ranch to teach all of my horses how to back. I guide my horse in a 360-degree circle, which teaches him things he can't learn backing through straight obstacles or "L" shapes. Here I'll outline the setup for this drill, the cues, and how to execute the exercise. Outfit your horse in a bit he responds to that you can pull on without scaring him, and ride with two hands. Be sure to pack your patience; this exercise requires time and practice to master.

The Setup

You can use a barrel instead of a tree, but a horse really respects that more visible (less movable) tree. Your horse would probably stomp all over a cone, however, so using something with a larger presence is helpful. Build a "box" around the tree, using 10- or 12-foot poles—or even 7-foot landscape timbers, if that's what you have on hand. With the tree in the center, your horse has both an inner and outer boundary for his circle. You can do this exercise without the poles, but it'll be harder to keep your horse on a tight circle. The box offers guidance, and your horse won't like stepping over a 4-inch-diameter pole. It's not that he can't step over it, because he can and probably will. But after you put him back inside the box a couple of times and he learns to stay inside the area, it'll be easier to keep him inside the box and on a tight circle.

It's also important that your horse already knows how to back. Backing straight is hard for some horses; backing *around* something is even more challenging for a lot of horses—especially if they're not flexible. Your horse must be accepting of and receptive to your aids.

Give the Cues

To keep your horse curled around the tree, you'll need to have the correct rein/leg position. Riding with two hands on the reins, move your inside rein slightly up and toward your horse's neck. This keeps his front end curved around the tree, with his shoulder pushed out slightly so that it doesn't hit the middle object. Hold your outside rein a bit lower, and draw back gently to help your horse take backward steps. Pressure from your outside leg, placed behind the cinch, will keep your horse's barrel curved around the tree by pushing his hip.

Your inside rein is key in guiding your horse. Thanks to the tree, you'll work hard to ensure that your horse doesn't smash your knee against it. If he backs up without curving the way you desire, he'll get too close to the tree, so you'll have to press him away from it with your inside rein while moving his hip to the inside, and taking a step back as you go. Strive for continual motion, though it'll be a start-stop venture to begin.

You'll probably find that your horse is really good one way and struggles in the other direction. Just like humans, horses are dominant on their right or left side. Your horse might have great control of one direction and lack the same level of finesse in the other. You can work that bad side a little more often, but don't neglect your good side.

One Step at a Time

Begin by suppling your horse while walking forward around the tree, within the confines of the poles. Ask for his face with your inside rein, and bend him around the tree with your outside leg. This familiarizes him with the body posi-



To cue for the maneuver, lift your inside rein up and across your horse's neck. Keep your outside rein low and draw gently for backward steps. Place your inside leg at the girth, and outside leg a bit farther back behind the cinch to move the hip around the obstacle.





You'll strive to eventually achieve these steps in one smooth motion, but start out one step at a time. Photo 1: Begin by asking the horse to give in the face. Photo 2: Move the front end away from the obstacle. Photo 3: Push the hip around. Photo 4: Ask for a step backward.

tion you'll ask for when you travel backward.

After walking a few steps, ask him to stop. Pick up your inside hand a little higher than his neck and place the rein against his neck to move his front end away from the obstacle. At the same time, draw back on the outside rein to ask him to take one step back. Next, move his hip toward the tree, and cue with your reins to step back. Or, you can try moving both the front and hind ends at the same time, taking one step back.

After your initial step back, you'll need to make adjustments. You can't hope for five perfect steps all at once. Probably every three or four steps, you'll have to move your horse's front end away from the tree, then adjust the back end, then take just one step back—depending on how he's shifted during that backing step.

Focus on getting one step at a time. Put him where he needs to be until you can blend both ends to move together. You can't go fast—even once your horse is more skilled with the exercise. The whole goal is to take each step one at a time, smooth like butter. It's difficult to do, but the rewards are worth it.

Quit While You're Ahead

Pay attention to your horse's demeanor while you execute this drill. If he gets antsy or upset, step outside the box, walk around for a little bit, then walk forward through the box one time before trying the backing again.

The best time to quit this exercise is when he does the maneuver better than he did it the last time you tried. He need be only slightly bet-





LEFT: If your horse gets antsy or frustrated, move him outside the box and work on moving forward and flexing. RIGHT: Quit when you're horse does the maneuver better than he did it yesterday or has improved since the beginning of your ride.



ter, as long as he improved. But don't hope for instant gratification. Be prepared for your horse to get confused and frustrated. Proceed slowly and patiently, one step at a time, and he'll figure it out. If you get after him, though, he'll come to dread the maneuver. If your horse gets stiff, supple him away from the box. Draw his neck to the left and right to loosen him up outside the box, then return to the exercise.

Transition to One Hand

Once you and your horse master this maneuver two-handed, move your hands closer together as you practice so it becomes more like riding one-handed. That way, when you do advance to performing the exercise with one hand, it won't feel completely unfamiliar to your horse. No matter if it's one-handed or two-handed riding, the inside rein is still the most important cue in this exercise. □



Nancy Cahill is an AQHA Professional Horsewoman with more than 47 years' experience guiding youth and amateur riders in all-around competition. She's won several AQHA world championship titles, and her clients have competed successfully at the state and national levels. She resides in Madisonville, Texas, with her husband and near her two children and grandchildren.



Once you've mastered the drill while riding two-handed, bring your hands closer together as you practice, then transition to performing it one-handed.

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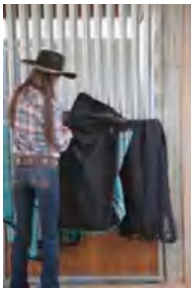
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BEST CARE FOR YOUR GEAR

If your equipment breaks mid-ride, or if it makes your horse uncomfortable, you'll find yourself spending more time trying to save your ride than enjoying it. Learn how you can keep each of your tack items in tip-top shape with our guide.

Saddle. Store your saddle on a rack. Use a saddle cover or carrier bag to keep dirt, dust, and other debris from damaging leather. Clean and oil the leather, polish the silver, and take care of saddle components. *Note:* Never leave your saddle on the ground, either upside down on the seat or skirt-down and spread open. If you don't have a saddle rack, store your saddle tipped forward on the pommel and horn.

Pads. Regularly brush excess horse hair and dirt from your pad. Take your pad to a do-it-yourself car wash for thorough spray-and-wash cleanings. Allow it to dry before storing. Keep it in shape by storing over a saddle rack, rather than flat or upside down.

Bridle, reins, and riding accessories. Hang your bridle, reins, and other riding accessories after each use. Store them to mimic how they'd sit on your horse. For example, if you keep your split reins attached to your bridle, your right rein should drape down under the bridle to the left, and then hang so that the end of your rein is on the right side. Regularly polish silver to avoid tarnish, oil your leather to keep it supple, and apply conditioning cream to rawhide.

Blankets. Brush off caked dirt and grime every chance you get. At the end of blanket season, dry-clean, machine-wash, or rinse your horse's blanket before storing it for the summer. Store clean blankets in bags.

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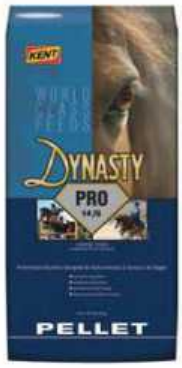
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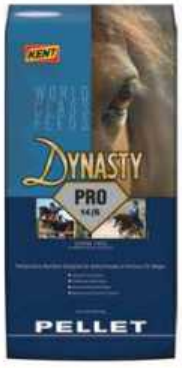
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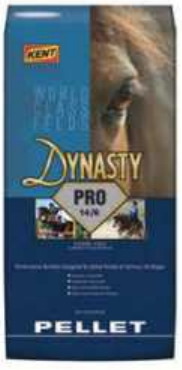
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Work Through Competitive Anxiety

A reader's horse experiences great nerves at events. Clinician Ty Brazeal discusses how to overcome the anxiety.

Produced by **Jennifer Paulson**

Q How do you work a horse through show anxiety? I have a horse that achieves great practice runs at home—and even in the practice arena at an event—but when it comes time for the competition, he acts skittish during speed events. Do you have any suggestions for helping him overcome his anxiety? He's been trained by my 15-year-old daughter who's been riding for eight years, two years specifically on this horse.

AMI PETERSON, Via Facebook

A Ami, judging by the information you've provided, you're dealing with a common problem horses and riders encounter when they leave home for any event, whether it's a horse show, a barrel race, a trail ride, or even just a trip to the vet: situational anxiety. Adding another stressor, such as the extra speed you might ask for at a barrel race, magnifies those feelings.

Here I'll outline five tips to keep in mind when riding this horse, and really any horse, in a new situation.

Foundation Is Everything

Whenever a rider has a problem, I tell them to look at the horse's foundation first. If there are any holes—even tiny ones—in his foundation, they'll show when he's tested, anxious, or unsure. Some key foundational elements include yielding properly to the rider's reins and legs, going forward without resistance or hesitation, and overall softness throughout the horse's body—at his poll, through his neck, and throughout his barrel and hindquarters.

Here's an example from my life that might resonate with you. When I was a teen, I had a horse I'd trained myself. I took him to a friend's house to ride, and we unexpectedly had to move cattle. The problem was, my horse had never seen cattle; this was his first time to ride outside the arena. I was nervous, but because we'd worked so much on basics and responding without hesitation or resistance, he listened to everything I asked him to do. Did he perform like a perfect cow horse? Not at all. But he was really good for his experience level.

Simulate the Situation at Home

Setting up the competitive situation at home allows your horse to confront his nerves in his safe home environment. Practice every element of the cue you'll use at home, and get as solid as possible. Practice as closely to how you'll ride at the show so your horse knows what to expect from you. If you'll ask for extra speed at the event, test it out at home first.

Also consider paid warm-ups and schooling shows as opportunities to put your horse in a stressful situation and work on his reactions.



Build a strong foundation of confidence and preparedness at home. This includes setting a solid foundation on your horse's skills and riding the same way you will at an event, right down to your cues. Your horse relies on consistency and leadership to perform under pressure.

Don't Go Changing

See a new technique or riding style that you admire at the show? Make note of it and try it at home. Don't completely change your riding style once you get to the event. It's unfair

Photo by Jennifer Paulson

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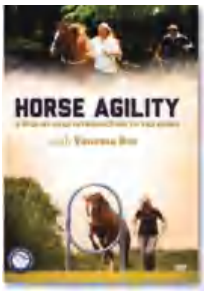
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to your horse. He has has one constant between home and a scary fairgrounds: you. He doesn't need you to change your riding style to mimic someone else's when he's already dealing with unexpected variables.

Furthermore, he can 100-percent detect your nerves and anxieties. Your horse relies on you to be his confident leader. Keep as much the same at an event as it is at home, all the way down to grooming and saddling. Your horse is a creature of habit and routine. Erratic, unexpected changes aren't fair to him and will unravel his confidence.

Get Over Yourself

Work on easing your own jitters by grounding yourself with confidence that you've done all the work at home. Focus on your horse and your riding to divert your attention from your own nerves. Be focused and 100-percent there for your horse. Faking it until you make it means your horse will remain calm and confident. And you might even convince yourself that you possess the leadership skills needed in the process.

Seek Extra Help

Especially in a situation like this, where your daughter is a young rider, keep her safety at the top of the priority list. When a horse's anxiety rises to the level of feeling threatened, he won't think twice about your daughter; his own safety will come first. Keep her safe by seeking help from a skilled professional trainer. Your daughter will learn a lot in the process, as well as keep out of danger. □



Ty Brazeal is a lifelong horseman who specializes in proper foundation training for horses of all ages and disciplines. Many of those he works with go on to compete in reining, roping, barrel racing, competitive trail, and other events. He also helps recreational riders. Brazeal conducts clinics throughout the southwest and California and provides colt-starting and rehabilitation services from his home in Phoenix, Arizona (**tybrazeal.com**).

Photo by Linda Brazeal

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– Barb Crabbe in "Vaccine Wars: The Great Debate," February 2011 H&R

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Horse&Rider

How I Beat Riding's Aches and Pains

You share your secrets for preventing or dealing with the soreness that comes from saddle time.

The key thing is to ride *regularly*. I get stiff only when I let a week or more go in between rides. Riding keeps me in good shape for riding—and soreness to a minimum.
Anita Moore Chapman, Michigan



Don't ride on a cheap saddle! On a well-made saddle with proper cushioning and a well-fitting, comfy seat, you're much less likely to get sore in the first place.
Laurie Hamilton, Kentucky

I'm 56 and kept getting sore in my seat bones and hip joints. A gel/fleece comfort cushion over the seat of my saddle made a noticeable difference. Plus it makes me feel so pampered!
Jennifer Morales, Oklahoma

My solution? Ride a "smoothie"—a Tennessee Walking Horse, Missouri Fox Trotter, or some other gaited breed. I used to be a Quarter Horse gal, but in my golden years, I'm riding a Walker. Big, big difference.
Jane Tremblay, Montana

Growing old together, my gelding and I both had leg problems and stiffness. Sound at the walk, he wouldn't trot or take both leads at the canter. I had knee and back pain. Then I discovered hyaluronic acid. Now he trots, canters, and bucks for fun. It's approved for people too, so we both take HA and ride out pain-free!
Cindy Hartman, Oregon

How you ride can make or "break" you, so to speak. I've learned to let my weight truly sink down into my heels, so my ankles can share the work of shock-absorption with my other leg joints and help protect my spine from too much concussion. I got this tip from my (older) trainer, who knows whereof she speaks.
Chris Sampson, Nevada

You can't beat a soak in a hot bath right after riding, before soreness sets in. Toss in a little Epsom salts for good measure.
Mary Ellen Hill, California

I swear by the soothing powers of arnica, a homeopathic medicine that comes from a plant (arnica montana) in Europe. It gives quick relief from muscle aches, stiffness, bruising, and swelling. It should be in everyone's medicine cabinet and emergency kit.
Carol Jones, Ontario, Canada

There are shock-absorbing stirrups that help, and I especially like the cushy inserts you can add to your regular stirrups. You choose the degree of compression, light or firm, that works for you. I'm a roper, and these inserts make it possible for me to enjoy my sport.
Tony Richardson, New Mexico

I avoid getting sore by staying as fit and flexible as I can, in and out of the saddle. When I stretch, I pay particular attention to my hamstrings, which tend to tighten up in riders and can cause knee pain.
Annie Owen, New Jersey

I loosen up my joints and warm my muscles before each ride by doing part of my horse's warm-up in hand. Yep—we both jog around the arena before I mount up. People think I'm nuts...but it works.
Cynthia Jackson, Alabama

Join in! In 50 or fewer words, describe any issues you've had when riding a mare as a result of her heat cycle. Respond by February 15 to **jfmeyer@aimmedia.com**. *Include your name/home state; put "You Said It/Heat Cycle" in the subject line.*

Illustration by Navah Rae Adams


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An Oakie With Cash
AKA "Louie"

THIS IS MY HORSE™

I've been horse-crazy since I was a 4-year-old little girl with my first pony, and it's still the same now with Louie! He's so tough, so gritty, and such a happy, fun-loving horse. I try to do all the little things for him: keep him happy, feed him right, make sure he's well-rested, and I think a close bond is really important. Having a great veterinarian is key, too. Dr. Swanson has been my vet for over 20 years, and having him on my team gives me so much confidence that we are doing the right thing for Louie and all my horses. He's the one that first recommended Platinum to me. I've been using it ever since because good nutrition is an essential part of performance, recovery, and also longevity.

Lisa Lockhart

Lisa Lockhart
9-time WNFR Qualifier, WNFR Average Winner,
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